

July/August
1999

LUTHERAN
WOMAN
TODAY

Live God's Justice



PROCESSED

JULY 4-5 1999

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Women of the ELCA

Fourth Triennial Convention

BRIEF PRAYERS ON NEWS ITEMS

Sonia C. Solomonson

Pray for people and concerns as you read or hear the news. Add these people to your prayer list or prayer book.

HONG KONG FACES MARRIAGE CRISIS

Evangelist Helen Hao of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong reported that since the hand-over to China in 1997, trade between Hong Kong and China is on the rise. Businesses are moving to the mainland and many husbands must leave their families behind in Hong Kong for months at a time. Hao said this has led to an increase in extramarital affairs and divorce.

*Loving God, bring healing, for-
giveness, and new life to couples
faced with such separations.*

ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY MEETS IN DENVER

“Making Christ Known: Hope for a New Century” will draw voting members and visitors to Denver on August 16 to 22. The voting

members will decide on items such as the Lutheran-Episcopal full-communion document and the economic-life statement. People will enjoy the “Mission Fiesta-val” that features a marketplace influenced by Hispanic and American Indian models. There will be a variety of worship experiences, too.

*May the Assembly decisions
further your work, O God, and
unite your people.*

MINNESOTA YOUTH SWOP

Churches in Mountain Iron and Buhl, Minn., offer youth ages 10 to 14 a six-week summer experience in community service, life-skills training, Bible study, and values building. The program, Summer Work Outreach Project (SWOP), helps participants learn self-respect and responsibility while they do such things as visit residents in nursing homes, clean up parks, and help seniors with home chores.

*Strengthen and bless ecumenical
youth programs such as SWOP,
O God. LWT*

*Sonia C. Solomonson is managing
editor for The Lutheran.*

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Editor
Nancy J. Stelling

**Managing
Editor**
Sue Edison-Swift

**Associate
Editor**
Kate Sprutta Elliott

**Production
Editor**
James Satter

**Graphic
Designer**
Linnea J. West Wong

Secretary
Bettelou Bruce

Guest Planners
Barbara Hofmaier
Marlene Joseph
Joan Pope
Doris Strieter

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Opinions expressed in the magazine are those of the writers and, except for the Women of the ELCA department and the Bible study, are not necessarily those of the Women of the ELCA.

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Triennium terms

As we get ready for the coming triennium of Women of the ELCA, part of our preparation includes becoming familiar with the words and terms that we use. Our new triennium will begin at the Fourth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA, on July 8–11, 1999, in St. Louis, Mo.

TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

Every three years delegates meet at a triennial convention to carry out the business of the organization. This business includes electing officers and Executive Board members and acting on memorials and resolutions. Delegates also act on these recommendations from the Executive Board: constitution and bylaw changes, and the proposed budget for the coming year. It's at the triennial convention that the educational resources for the coming three years are introduced.

TRIENNIMUM

The three years immediately following a triennial convention are referred to as the triennium. The next triennium will run from the convention in July 1999 until the convention in July 2002.

THEME FOR THE TRIENNIMUM

The theme of the triennial convention and of the programming for the following three years is the theme for the triennium. **“Live God’s**

Justice” is the theme for the 1999 triennial convention and for the 1999–2002 triennium.



“LIVE GOD’S JUSTICE”

The biblical foundation for the theme is **Micah 6:8**.

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The theme will be explored throughout the triennium as Women of the ELCA are encouraged to increase their understanding of justice issues and to become advocates for healing and wholeness in society.

EMPHASIS FOR THE TRIENNIMUM

The focus for the three years between triennial conventions is the emphasis for the triennium. The Women of the ELCA emphasis for the 1999–2002 triennium is on women and children in crisis—especially the crises of poverty, AIDS, and domestic violence. Throughout 1999–2002, programming and resources of Women of the ELCA will emphasize justice concerns. Opportunities and resources will be provided to help participants “Live God’s Justice” in all areas of their lives. **LWT**

*Marlene S. Joseph
Associate Executive Director
Women of the ELCA*

Good morning, St. Louis!

Good morning, Women of the ELCA everywhere!

Good morning *from* St. Louis and *to* St. Louis, site of the Fourth Triennial Convention, July 8-11, 1999, and the Women of Color pre-convention gathering July 5-7.

Whether you are reading this in St. Louis, in Seattle or Savannah, in a ranch kitchen near Spearfish, S.D., or in downtown San Antonio, you can be a part of triennial convention by participating in the Convention Bible Study (see pp. 24-40) and in the eight-day morning-prayer partnership that follows.

We'll begin daily as Martin and Katie Luther did:

Upon arising, make the sign of the cross and say:
Under the care of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then, say the **Apostles' Creed**, the **Lord's Prayer**, and this prayer:

"I give thanks to you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger, and I ask that you would also protect me today from sin and every danger, so that my life and my actions may please you. Into your hands I commend myself: my body, my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me."

(Martin Luther's Small Catechism, a contemporary translation)

Then, follow with these petitions:

SUNDAY, JULY 4

God of our journey, keep all who travel to the triennial convention safe in your care, confident in your grace, and clearly focused on the purpose of their journey, so that the peace and justice of God may be known to all. For Jesus' sake ... hear our prayer. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 5

Thank you for making us one in baptism. Bless our sisters of all colors who assemble today for the pre-convention Women of Color Gathering. Give women everywhere the grace and courage to confront the sin of racism, so that the peace and justice of God may be known to all. *Señor, ten piedad!* (Lord, have mercy!) Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 6

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who calls, equips, and supports us in ministries of daily life. Be with convention volunteers and staff who prepare exhibits, meeting areas, and facilities to welcome thousands of sisters in Christ. Make your peace and justice known through their faithful service. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 7

Send your Holy Spirit to guide churchwide officers and executive board members, synodical presidents, and elected delegates as they gather today for orientation. Give them clear, bold vision for Women of the ELCA in the 21st century, that your peace and justice may be known through their deliberations and decisions. Amen.

THURSDAY, JULY 8

Thank you, God, for all faithful women who have served your church over the centuries, especially for past churchwide presidents of Women of the ELCA—Jeanne Rapp, Gwen Carr, Jan Peterson, for current president Sharroll Bernahl—and for the woman who will be elected president today. You already know her by name. Make known to her your grace as she prepares to lead us in living your justice. Amen.

FRIDAY, JULY 9

Blessed Jesus, as our convention focuses on children, we remember how you came as a vulnerable baby. We remember your love of the little ones and your warnings to those who keep them from you. Show us how to live your justice with and for children. Amen.

SATURDAY, JULY 10

O Christ, who welcomed women as full participants in the gospel, be present today as this convention focuses on God's justice for women of all ages, in all places, in crises of any kind, in want of basic human rights, in peril for your name's sake. Grant us vision and courage to live your justice on behalf of women everywhere. Amen.

SUNDAY, JULY 11

O God, you have gathered us again around Word and Sacrament, to right our wrongs and to send us forth in your grace and peace. You have brought us through four days of prayer, worship, celebration, study, deliberation, and discovery of your purpose for Women of the ELCA. Bless churchwide officers and executive-board members who will be installed at the closing worship service of the triennial convention this day. Bless your daughters in ministries of community-building, spiritual growth, and action for Jesus' sake. Bring us safely to Philadelphia in 2002 for the Fifth Triennial Convention, ready to recall how your justice has been made known, and ready to listen to your call. Amen! **LWT**

*Catherine I. H. Braasch
Executive Director
Women of the ELCA*

Live God's Justice

Note: You will need flashlights for the last part of this ritual, and lights will be turned off. For your safety, please remain standing in your place until lights are turned on again.

Reader "... put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." (*Ephesians 6:15*)

Leader We come to the end of this triennium of Women of the ELCA. We rejoice in our theme, "Proclaim God's Peace." Throughout the last three years we have celebrated our faith, and proclaimed the peace of God to our families, our communities, and the world.

Hymn "You Are the Seed / *Sois la semilla* " (WOV 753, verse 1)
(*The first candle is lit.*)

Community With joy and thanksgiving we light a candle.
We give thanks to God for:
Where we have been,
What we have learned, How we have grown,
Those whose lives have been touched,
And how we have lived out our ministries.

Reader "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (*Micah 6:8*)

Leader The theme for the next triennium of Women of the ELCA is "Live God's Justice." Throughout the next three years we will seek to increase our understanding of justice issues. We will work to strengthen our skills, and become effective advocates for healing and wholeness in society. We will create a welcoming and safe place for all people in our homes, our communities, and the world. (*The second candle is lit.*)

Community With joy and hopefulness we light a candle. We ask God's blessing on:
Where we will go,
What we will learn, How we will grow,
Those lives that will be touched,
And how we will shape our ministries.

Leader Lord, God of peace and justice,

Community We call on you
For those who suffer injustice and inequality.
For those who are oppressed and exploited.

Leader Lord, God of peace and justice,

Community

You call on us
To be truthful and courageous,
To live your justice.

Leader

Lord, God of justice, there is much that you require of us:

Community

We must not look away from injustice and inequality.
We must not be silent in the face of prejudice and intolerance.
We must not accept a climate of hate and fear of those
who are "other."

We must not tolerate unfairness and discrimination.

Leader

Lord, God of justice, there is much that we must do.

Community

We must be responsive to the needs of others.
We must seek to understand and embrace diversity.
We must name your truth.
We must be the voice of the voiceless.
We must confront our "isms" and phobias.
We must decry all forms of violence.
We must model living in true community.
We must proclaim that all children of this world
Are fully and equally children of God.

Hymn

"You Are the Seed" (WOV 753, verse 2).

Leader

Lord, God of justice, we begin our new triennium with a
commitment.

Community

We will hold on to one another,
Give thanks for each other,
And prepare for the journey ahead.
We will grow strong together,
And go forth with God's love,
To fill the world with God's justice.

*(The overhead lights are turned off as the community stands,
turns on flashlights, and holds them at shoulder-height.
Flashlights remain on throughout the rest of the ritual.)*

Leader

In our togetherness, and by God's grace, we find strength.
Our light will shine in the church, society, and the world.

(Community says together The Lord's Prayer.)

Hymn

"You Are the Seed" (WOV 753, verse 3).

Leader

Go in peace. Live God's justice.

Community

We will live God's justice. We will hold all of God's people in
our hearts.

**Suggestions
for use**

This ritual may be used as participants prepare for the beginning
of the next triennium. To symbolize unending love, the
community sits in a circle, with two candles on a table in the
center. **WV**

Justice JUICE

Through their offerings of time and money, Women of the ELCA participants have always supported ministries of justice for women and children. The offering to be received at the triennial convention in July will continue that tradition of support.

WHAT IS A JUSTICE MINISTRY?

A justice ministry is one that not only responds to immediate needs but also empowers people to *overcome* situations of injustice and oppression. Justice ministries are the life-giving "juice" that energizes people to become everything that God wishes them to be. Justice ministries are:

- Just
- Unique
- Inspirational
- Community-helping
- Empowering

JUST

Ministries that are just generally concentrate on addressing specific social injustices.



Past and present program participants and Enterprising Kitchen staff.

One such ministry is ***The Martin Luther Children's Center*** in California, which meets the needs of children born into poverty by providing quality infant care to low-income families through its "At-Risk Scholarship Program."

Lutheran Family Mission in Chicago addresses issues of economic justice for women and children by training women as home day-care providers. These women then offer safe, affordable, and educational environments for children in the community so their parents can provide adequate incomes for their families.

UNIQUE

Some of the ministries supported by Women of the ELCA have found unique, innovative ways of promoting justice.

Broadleigh: Community of Promise, a creative new program of Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio, has graduated its first class of "Broadleigh Ambassadors," specially trained parents who now work at the community elementary school as teacher aides and child advocates. Many of these parents are making the transition from welfare to work. Women of the ELCA groups support this ministry with children's book drives, while the ELCA's Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University provide volunteer tutors.

Equally unique is the ***Creative Learning Center*** sponsored by Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan. This after-school program for impoverished neighborhood children focuses on self-expression through the arts. The many activities offered include poetry-writing, country-dancing, jewelry-making, puppet-making, and gardening.

***"I can
make a
difference."***

INSPIRATIONAL

Justice ministries inspire people to stretch and grow and achieve.

Resurrection Lutheran Church in New Haven, Conn., sponsors ***College Bound / College Advocacy***, encouraging high-school graduates in the congregation, most of whom are from low-income families, to pursue a college education. Recently, when seven of the congregation's 11 college students were in church on the same day, the pastor called them to the front to be recognized. Says Pastor Ruth Drews, "I wanted so very much for the crowd of younger children to see these young people, to hug them and welcome them home, to look at them and say, 'I want to be standing up there someday!'"

The Enterprising Kitchen in Chicago works with women living in poverty to develop their skills in preparation for permanent employment. Women gain experience by producing packaged coffees, soup mixes, and natural soaps. Ten of the 23 program participants have now graduated to mainstream employment. Several lines from a poem written by one of the participants serve as an inspiration to others:

*I can work, I can be heard, I can be on time,
I can make things work when times get hard,
I can listen to others, I can talk to others,
I can help others,
I can make a difference,
I am a Very Important Person!
We are all special in God's world.*

**Justice
ministries
are the
life-
giving
juice ...**

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Justice ministries, while concerned about justice for individuals, sometimes focus as well on the larger community.

Located in an isolated rural area, Christ Lutheran Church in Libby, Mont., reaches out to a community devastated by unemployment and financial hardship, which has taken its toll on the quality of family relationships. In this context, the church's *Parenting Choices* program serves the community by offering parent development and support classes, with priority given to divorced or separated mothers in the community.

Also responding to the concerns of a rural community is the ***Rural Women, Small Agriculture, and Community Development Initiative***, an ecumenically supported program in Baker County, Ga., which assists women currently on welfare to become self-employed as commercial producers of organically grown vegetables. Crucial to this program is a revolving loan fund through which women can purchase start-up equipment and supplies. Recently they have reactivated a farmers' cooperative, intending that it will have a major economic impact in the county.

EMPOWERING

Justice ministries empower people to assume productive roles in church and society.

The women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa, through a leadership development seminar, ***Sitting at the Table As Equals***, empowers women with a vision of a church that reflects mutual partnership between women and men. In this vision, "leadership is the art of weaving together relationships in a tapestry that reflects our unity and diversity," says coordinator Edith Kathi. Through the seminar, women learn self-assertiveness and the leadership skills necessary to fulfill any position in the church.

**... that
energizes
people to
become
all God
wants
them to
be.**

A congregational social ministry at Christ Lutheran Church in Reading, Pa., ***The Women's Empowerment Center*** mentors women in preparation for economic self-sufficiency. Annie, a waitress working long hours, came to the center lacking the confidence to seek a better job. With support from other women, she now has a better-paying job with "family-friendly" hours and is saving to purchase her own home.

Although justice ministries come in all sizes and shapes, they share a commitment to support people as they struggle to *overcome* injustices in their own lives and communities.

HOW WILL THE 1999 TRIENNIAL CONVENTION OFFERING SUPPORT JUSTICE MINISTRIES?

As in the past, 50 percent of the offering will be directed to the churchwide organization for its ministries. The other half will be distributed after the convention as grants to local congregations or Women of the ELCA unit-supported ministries that promote justice for women and children. This time—and it is a first—the convention offering will be "recycled," so to speak, to assist the ministries of those who give the offering!

HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE TO THIS OFFERING?

Send your Triennial Convention Offering to your synodical treasurer. Make out the check to Women of the ELCA and write "Triennial Convention Offering" on the memo line. If you need her name and address, call 800-638-3522, ext. 2730. Or you can send a check directly to the churchwide office: Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189. The Triennial Convention Offering will be received at opening worship on July 8, 1999, in St. Louis, Mo.

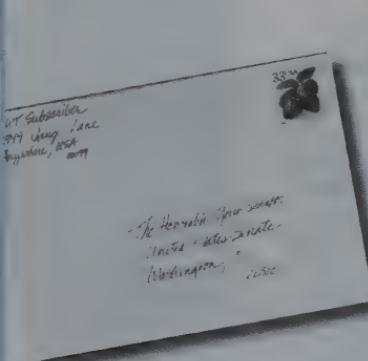
HOW CAN MY CHURCH APPLY FOR A CONVENTION-OFFERING GRANT?

Criteria and application forms will be available at the churchwide convention and through the churchwide office (800-638-3522, ext. 2747) after July 20. The October 1999 issue of LWT will carry more details. **LWT**



Program graduates from the Enterprising Kitchen.

*Doris Strieter
Program Director
Women of the ELCA*



Want to change the world? Write a letter!

Faye R. Codding

“You have got to be kidding!” is most people’s response. When I tell them that the average number of letters a legislator in Congress receives from constituents each year is five, people are shocked. Eight letters can be considered a landslide! What is even more surprising to many people is the fact that legislators pay attention to their mail. Letters from constituents matter—and effective letters have changed the world.

During a congressional session legislators often read aloud (so that it gets into the Congressional Record) a letter that contains a personal story or observation. Senator Byron Dorgan, an active ELCA member, often speaks to groups about how a letter on the farm crisis made him look carefully at future bills that affected farm families. For weeks he carried that letter in his briefcase as a reminder of the issue’s importance.

The most effective letter is a personal one, not a form letter. The letter should be concise, informed, and polite. Some tips:

To receive the 17-minute video, “A Voice in God’s World,” telling the story of the

ELCA’s involvement in advocacy and how your congregation can become more involved, contact the ELCA Distribution Service at 800-328-4648. Code 67-1250. Cost: shipping and handling only.

- Try to stick to one page, two pages at most. Don’t write on the back of a page. If you are writing long-hand, take special care to write legibly.
- In the first paragraph, state your purpose. Stick to one subject or issue. Support your position with the rest of the letter.
- State that you are a member of the ELCA, or mention your particular circle or congregation. If your church (or the ELCA) has a policy statement relating to the issue, state it, noting that this is a commonly held position within your faith group.
- Usually you do not need to cite a particular bill by name and number. Often bills are amended and may not be what you intend to endorse when your

(Continued on page 15)

(Date)

(Your address)

The Honorable _____ (or) The Honorable
United States House _____ United States Senate _____
of Representatives _____ Washington, D.C. 20510
Washington, D.C. 20515
Dear Representative _____

The Honorable _____
United States Senate _____
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Senator _____

As a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I am writing to encourage you to support legislation that eases the debt burden of poor countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Many nations now spend four times as much on repaying their debt as on health care. Millions of children end up suffering needlessly! It is urgent that the U.S. Congress act to help break the chains of debt of poor nations in order to free up resources that can be used to ease the burden of poverty and protect the environment.

To meet this problem, the ELCA is supporting the Jubilee 2000 movement—a worldwide effort to cancel, by the new millennium, the backlog of unpayable international debt of the poorest countries. I support legislation that would cancel such unpayable, crushing debts in the future. Such legislation should see that representatives from civil society take part in deciding the conditions for both debt relief and new lending. Nor should such legislation carry with it new ways that oppress the people by deepening poverty or environmental degradation. Positive legislation on this matter would give a fresh start to those deep in debt, benefiting millions of people.

I urge you to take action to cancel the debt of the poorest countries, and give these countries a chance to invest in its people. Thank you for your careful consideration of this very important issue.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

CHILD-CARE SAMPLE LETTER

(Date)

(Your address)

The Honorable _____ (or) The Honorable _____
United States House _____ United States Senate _____
of Representatives _____ Washington, D.C. 20510
Washington, D.C. 20515

It is important that you make a serious investment in child care this year. The President made a commitment to child care and after-school activities in his budget. I encourage you to support this funding. The increased funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, after-school care, Head Start, and the Early Learning Fund, as well as an expansion of the Dependent Care Tax Credit that includes parents who stay at home with children under age one is so important. The continued funding for college-campus-based child care and the tax credit for employers who invest in child care are important, too.

Recent reports show that many caregivers provide poor quality care. Subsidies provided to low-income working families are too low to meet the real need here, and there are long waiting lists for these subsidies. With more and more welfare recipients joining the workforce, often at low wages, we must be sure that their children are not put at risk in their absence.

(Share your own experiences about child care, or experiences you know of here.)

I believe it should be a national priority to invest in child care that is affordable, accessible, and of high quality.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

letter arrives. Instead cite the issue and what you want to happen.

- If you have particular facts about your community, include them. Share your personal experiences.
- If you believe that a particular legislation or view is wrong and should be opposed, say so directly and indicate the likely adverse effects. If you have an idea for a better approach, suggest it in the letter.
- Ask for the legislator's views and how he or she is planning to vote.
- Be sure your name and return address are legible.
- Send a copy of the letter to the local newspaper so there's awareness that the community cares about the issue.
- Consider organizing a letter-writing campaign with members of your congregation. The more mail a legislator receives on a particular issue, the better informed he or she will be.

One of the in-kind gifts to be received at the Fourth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA (July 8-11, 1999) is letters of advocacy. Specifically, letters on the issues of **Jubilee 2000** and **child care**. Sample letters on both these issues are found on pages 13-14. (For more about Jubilee 2000, contact LOGA for a free packet of information, and see "Proclaim Jubilee: Break the Chains of Debt," the article on pages 16-19.) What a fitting way to carry out the theme "Live God's Justice."

If you attend the triennial convention in St. Louis, you may bring your letter(s) to the exhibit hall or write the letter there. If you are not able to attend the triennial convention, consider joining your sisters in Christ in changing the world by sending your letter on these issues directly to Washington, D.C.

Imagine the average number of five letters turning into thousands of letters coming to representatives and senators telling of our concern on these important issues. Don't be surprised if your letter gets tucked into a briefcase and carried around until these issues are solved. **LWT**

Faye R. Codding is an ELCA pastor and grass-roots coordinator for the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA). The sample letters on pages 13-14 are written by LOGA staffers Mark Brown and Kay Bengston.



For more information on these and other issues or advocacy materials contact:

Lutheran Office for
Governmental Affairs
(LOGA)
122 C St. NW
Suite 125
Washington, DC 20001

Phone: 202-783-7507
Fax: 202-783-7502
Web site: www.loga.org

Proclaim JUBILEE

Break the Chains of Debt

Tammy Walhof

An exciting movement is afoot. This movement, wrapped in prayer from the beginning, now has more than 40 campaigns worldwide involving more than 70 countries. It is called **Jubilee 2000**—and it unites Protestants, Catholics, Evangelicals, and other faith traditions from around the world. Could this be evidence of anything but the Spirit of God at work through God's people?

Jubilee 2000 is an international movement calling for a one-time cancellation of the crushing debts of very poor countries for the new millennium. This call is vigorously supported by leaders such as Archbishop Tutu and Pope John Paul II. A focus of the Jubilee 2000/USA campaign is the passage of legislation to cancel or significantly reduce the debt owed by the poorest countries to the U.S. government and to institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The Jubilee 2000 movement is based on the Old Testament idea of jubilee. Author and speaker Ched Meyers points out that jubilee is part of the sabbath vision God has for the world. The sabbath cycles that God instituted for the care of creation and the care of God's people are woven throughout the Old Testament. Not only was the seventh day to be a day of rest, but the seventh year was to be a year of rest and healing for the land. The healing applied to people, too. Every seven years, debts were to be canceled. The year of jubilee—the 50th year following seven times seven years—was to be a time of restoring God's right order. The laws laid out for sabbatical years and jubilee years in Leviticus 25 stressed that "the land is mine [God's] ... you are but aliens and tenants" (v. 23). Those who had fallen on hard times and had been forced to sell themselves into slavery were to be released from their captivity.

Jesus offered healing and restoration even on the sabbath—to the chagrin of the Pharisees, who found it inconvenient to widen their narrow sabbath practices to the greater vision of restoring God's right order of justice, mercy, and shalom. Jesus also emphasized the jubilee restoration when he applied the words of the prophet Isaiah to himself.

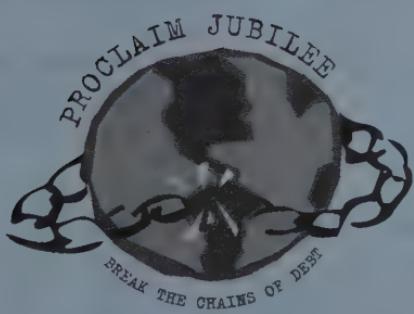
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

(Luke 4:18-19).

To see how this jubilee vision may apply today, it helps to understand how countries got into debt in the first place, and how firmly this debt grips the most vulnerable people.

Much of the debt stems from loans given to undemocratic governments that are no longer in power. Loans were rewards to "friendly governments" in



WHAT CAN I DO?

- 1) Write your member of Congress and urge him or her to co-sponsor the Debt Relief for Poverty Reduction Act of 1999—H.R. 1095. (See page 12 for the article "Want to change the world? Write a letter.") Contact the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) or Bread for the World for up-to-date information. See the box on page 19 for contact information.
- 2) Plan an "Offering of Letters" for your women's group or congregation. Order an Offering of Letters Kit from Bread for the World. The Kit includes background information, a Q & A section, glossary of terms, sample presentation, tips for organizing a letter-writing event, worship aids, a poster, and a video. Cost: \$7.
- 3) Pray for receptivity by members of Congress, passage of the legislation, and cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries.

the years of the Cold War. The money was often used to support oppressive militaries while money for development projects was skimmed away by corrupt dictators.

roclaim Jubilee



break the Chains of Debt

failed to consider local factors. In addition, many loans taken out by countries in the late 1960s and 1970s were very cheap, with 4 to 6 percent interest rates, but these rates skyrocketed in 1979 to 22 to 24 percent when the U.S. Federal Reserve changed its operating procedures. When countries couldn't pay the full amount of interest, their debts ballooned.

Currently, the debt of the poorest countries is largely public debt owed to Northern Hemisphere governments (including the

Other loans went to countries genuinely interested in development. However, sometimes projects designed far from the communities where they were put into practice

United States) and to international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is not commercial debt owed to private creditors. Those who shoulder the burden of these debts are the most vulnerable of our world, living in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, the IFIs have adopted "structural adjustment policies" (SAPs) meant to help countries pay their debts. Some of the SAPs demand cutting everything possible from national budgets. As a result, education and health care become luxuries for those who can afford them. My Nicaraguan friend Rosa died because she chose to feed her children rather than buy the expensive medicine she needed.

Other SAPs claim that it makes more sense to use land for production of export crops (which bring in dollars for debt payments), and to import food for local consumption. My friend Antonio, however, is an example of the dilemma such policies create. On his small plot of land, Antonio had always raised food and coffee to eat, drink, and sell. As he was being pushed off his land, he considered his options: (1) work on the neighbor-

ing coffee plantation for less than \$1 a day, an insufficient wage to feed his family; (2) go to Costa Rica to work on coffee plantations and leave his family behind; (3) move to Managua, live in a cardboard house, and compete with the rest of the 70 percent of unemployed Nicaraguans moving to the cities in search of scarce work; or 4) illegally sneak into the United States. "Could I make a living for my family there?" he asked me.

Unpayable debts are squashing countries, killing people like Rosa, and making unbearable choices for people like Antonio. *Hunger relief depends on debt relief.* It's as simple as that! It is time to restore "right order" in God's world. The call is clear. You can make this happen. Proclaim jubilee! Break the chains of debt and set the captives free! LWT



Tammy Walhof is regional organizer for Bread for the World in the Upper Midwest (Minneapolis Office). She has passion for justice and a master's degree in public policy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bread for the World

1100 Wayne Ave., Suite 1000
Silver Spring, MD 20910
1-800-82-BREAD.

Web site: www.bread.org

Jubilee 2000/USA

222 East Capitol St., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20003-1036
202-783-3566

Web site: www.j2000usa.org

Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs

122 C. St. N.W., Suite 125
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-783-7507

Web site: www.loga.org



Women of the ELCA is collecting letters of advocacy, including those for Jubilee

as in-kind gifts at the Fourth Triennial Convention in St. Louis, July 8-11, 1999. People may (1) bring their letter(s) to St. Louis; (2) go to the "Hall of Justice" to write a letter during the convention; (3) ask someone attending the convention to bring your letter to St. Louis (letters may not be mailed to Women of the ELCA offices, or to St. Louis); or (4) send your letter directly to your congressional representative or senator. For more information about this and other in-kind gifts, contact your triennial convention coordinator, or Lynn Frank, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2739 (or contact her by email at lfrank@elca.org).

God's own hospitality

Karen Melang

If you want to see God's brand of hospitality, take a look at Jesus.

I am not a very hospitable person. I can host a simple dinner party, and I've thrown a few memorable Christmas parties; but at bottom, I am not very hospitable. Still, I know hospitality when I see it.

Several years ago my friends Tom and Marlene opened their house (already filled with three teenagers and a cat) to Abby, a Chinese-American teenager who needed another home. She was desperate to stop being the grown-up for her severely mentally ill mother. When she moved in with Tom and Marlene, Abby was eager for adolescence, and she promptly dyed her hair bright blue and pierced her nose.

Tom and Marlene were less than thrilled, but Abby thrived in their care, and her hair grew out. I remember Abby showing me her application for an overseas study opportunity (for which she was chosen). It included a page of photographs, two of which were carefully labeled "my house" and "my family." There on the page were Tom's and Marlene's house and family, but by then they were Abby's, too. Their hospitality had made it so. **Hospitality breaks down walls and offers a place of safety and belonging.**

Many years ago, when my son was young, I worked in a residence for elderly, mentally ill people. One of these folks, Arnold, became my special friend. Arnold loved pancakes, so I often invited him to our home for pancake suppers. Being away from his home made Arnold uncomfortable, so he usually wanted to eat and run.

One evening, after we'd taken Arnold back to his home, I wondered aloud to my 4-year-old son, Marty, why Arnold never said thanks for the pancake dinners. I thought it was an opportunity to teach Marty good manners. "Mom," Marty said patiently, "we don't have Arnold over so he'll thank us. We have him over so he'll enjoy himself" "Oh," I said softly.

I'm the one who learned some manners. Marty taught me something profound about being a host. **Hospitality does not expect gratitude or anything else, but it opens a space for community to happen.**

I have personally been on the receiving end of some of earth's finest hospitality. Several years ago I was a Women of the ELCA Woman to Woman visitor to Cameroon. I cannot tell you how many times I was greeted by hundreds of people dancing and drumming to welcome me to their villages.

Women dressed in brilliantly colored clothing would greet me and tell me, when I arrived at 7 p.m., that they had been waiting all day for me. I knew it was true. With no phones available, there was no way to send a message that our group was delayed, that we would not be there until evening.

The welcomes I received were so overwhelming that I always got a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. "It's only me," I wanted to say, but of course the entire celebration was precisely for me. **Authentic hospitality, no matter how simple or complicated, is extravagant in its warmth.**

Jesus' life and ministry overflowed with welcome for all kinds of people: wealthy women, blind beggars, scholars of the law, prostitutes and tax collectors, those possessed by demons, and those consumed by guilt or greed. The hungry, the sick, and the curious constantly crowded

around Jesus, who spread the widening welcome of God's love and mercy to all comers. If you want to see God's brand of hospitality, take a look at Jesus.

We, too, have been the recipients of God's very own hospitality. Once (or perhaps often) we have been alone or afraid or embarrassed or guilt-ridden or grieving or a stranger, and someone has passed God's welcome on to us. Now it is both our duty and our delight to pass that welcome on to others.

Whenever we genuinely welcome others into our lives and communities, something new is likely to happen. New relationships will form. New viewpoints will surface. Things could change. **Hospitality is always a bit of a risk.**

But it is a risk worth taking, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (*Hebrews 13:2*). Perhaps you will not have a chance to entertain angels bringing news of a long-awaited baby, as Abraham and Sarah did in Genesis. But you might get a wonderful young woman like Abby or a record-breaking pancake-eater like Arnold, and believe me, it will be enough. **LWT**

Karen Melang, a communications associate with the Nebraska 4-H, is a member of All Saints Lutheran, Lincoln, Neb.

Stories to share

Erica Ehrke

I sat outside the church, enjoying the sun and writing in my journal about how my youth trip to California was going.

At first, there were just a few people milling around outside the church. One woman looked like my stereotype of a homeless person: she had a shopping-cart filled with clothes and other odds-and-ends. A scruffy-looking man rode up to the church on a bent-up, old bike with a sack tied to the handlebars.

By the time the women in the kitchen called us to the tables to eat, more than 30 people had gathered around the church's fellowship hall. My youth group spread out among the tables to talk with the homeless people who were the day's guests.

Over spaghetti and garlic bread, I talked with the gentleman sitting next to me. Tom had gone to college in Utah, where he had earned a bachelor's degree. The streets became Tom's home when he was unable to find a job and his landlord evicted him for not being able to pay his rent. Over and over again, Tom thanked me for spending time with him that afternoon.

Karen, the organizer of the luncheon, told us that she was at the church because she had once been homeless. After her release from a mental institution, Karen's family abandoned her and she had nothing. "Monsters and dragons" were in her head, and she was alone.

One day a man at the Laundromat asked Karen if she needed help, if he could get ahold of anyone for her. Karen began to tell him how everyone she knew had turned against her. This man helped Karen get the medical attention she needed, and he gave her some money to get her started in her own business, an organization for the homeless. She spends her days trying to find ways to get people off the streets.

My journal entry for the close of the day: "*Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the people I met today. Thank you for the love of my family and friends at home. May I never take them for granted. Protect and guide all of your people with stories to share. Amen.*" LWT

Erica Ehrke is a pharmacy major at Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio. She is a member of East Koshkonong Lutheran, Cambridge, Wis.

Secure in the promise,

“How we live in this life makes a difference.” “We need to live our faith now.” “We have the call.” “We are priests of the kingdom.”

Gwen Sayler, author of *Secure in the Promise: A Study of Revelation*, the Bible study just completed in LWT, shared these thoughts in the Bible study's promotional video.

When I first saw that video, I was struck by how the Bible study would lead us all to live God's justice—exactly what Women of the ELCA's triennium theme is calling us to do in 1999 to 2002!

The audiocassette that came with the Leader Guide for the study also supports the “Live God's Justice” theme. On the audiocassette I heard these words: “Visions we see in Revelation give hope of vindication for the faithful and accountability for the oppressors.... These visions in Revelation help us see a God who is committed to the oppressed. Given that commitment, how can we, the privileged, use our power to make a positive difference?”

Those of us who have just completed this study of Revelation found lots of encouragement for living God's justice. Dr. Sayler gave concrete suggestions in the section of the Bible study called “Walk the Walk.” In the second

we can

session, for example, she suggested that readers make financial contributions to help World Hunger Appeal. Women of the ELCA immediately began receiving checks specifically marked for World Hunger. She also mentioned joining groups like Bread for the World.

Gwen Sayler also challenges us to examine our attitudes. For example, in session 5, she suggests that Women of the ELCA groups learn more about prostitution. For many of us, that requires an attitude shift. It's not always easy.

There are so many things to learn to help us truly live out our faith. This Revelation Bible study has given us so much food for thought, visions to proclaim, and attitudes to examine. What marvelous preparation for doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God! Thank you, Gwen Sayler. **LWT**

*Joan Pope
Program Director, Women of the ELCA*

live God's justice

Live God's Justice

Stacy Kitahata



SESSION I

What is God's justice?

STUDY TEXT

Micah 2:1-5 The prophet's critique

Micah 4:1-4 God's vision of justice

MEMORY VERSE

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
(*Micah 6:8*)

SESSION I

pages 24-30

SESSION 2

pages 35-40

LEADER GUIDE

pages 31-34

OPENING

God of compassion and mercy, grant that we might recognize our neighbors, wealthy and poor, varied in color and race, neighbors nearby and far away, neighbors who serve us even when we are unaware. Amen.

(Adapted from With One Voice 765, stanza 2)

LIVE GOD'S JUSTICE

"Live God's Justice" is the theme for the Women of the ELCA Fourth Triennial Convention, the 1999-2002 triennium, and this Bible study. With the help of the prophet

Micah, and some sisters from around the world, we will try to discern God's justice and how to live that justice in our daily life.

This study is shaped by the input of the international women's Bible study at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). The women in this study are from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe; most are at LSTC as the spouses of students. While their backgrounds are as diverse as their cultures, most live much more simply than we do in the United States. English is their second, third, or fourth language, but it is the one they have in common, and the language in which they study the Bible together each week.

Because biblical justice demands transformation, together we take a leap of faith and courage, ready for change in our hearts and our spirits, and in the ordering of society. It is the journey of a lifetime, an adventure with God. In this first of two sessions, we begin recognizing God's justice. In the next session (pp. 35-40), we explore how to live out justice in our daily lives.

THE PROPHET'S CRITIQUE

Rather than making predictions about the future, prophets remind us of God's blessings, and they call on us to return to God. As such, prophets' words are not only for their own time, but also for us today.

Micah wrote to the people of Judah. Other prophets during the eighth century before Christ included Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. Why were there so many prophets speaking at this time? It was a period of relative peace and abundance. As in our own time, some people were able to increase their wealth and standard of living and take part in that abundance. Unfortunately, many others were not. But, worse, the oppressed were victimized by their *own sisters and brothers in the faith*—neighbors, not enemies or invaders—who used their power for their own gain!

The prophets direct their wrath toward those who covet the lands and homes of others and leave them without a future. Note that the word *covet* in Micah 2:2 is the same as that used in the Ten Commandments, specifically the command against coveting neighbor's possessions (Exodus 20:17). Coveting is an act of dissatisfaction, a sense that what one has is not enough.

Some people fulfill their desires simply because they have power. Micah accused them of scheming in their sleep and having the luxury of waking to follow through with their plans (Micah 2:1). They apply their power to the social system to amass more wealth. By doing so, they overturn God's intention for an equitable distribution of the resources for life among all the people. The whole system is out of balance. Micah declares that an unjust disparity reigns in the land of Judah: few are rich; most are poor. Micah announces God's displeasure with this situation.

1. **Read Micah 2:1-5.** Circle the words that most accurately reveal the tone of this passage.

comfort	threat
shame	pride
anger	pleasure
blessing	woe

2. What feelings would you experience if you were one of the oppressed and you heard this prophecy? What if you were one of those being addressed by the prophecy?

3. To what people in your community and our world do you think Micah would be speaking today? How are you like those people Micah prophesies to, and how are you not like them?

SEEING CLEARLY

In Micah's day, people lived closely together. Those whom Micah addressed could look directly into the faces of the neighbors who supplied the labor and resources that fueled their accumulation. This is less true for us. We are often geographically and socially separated from those whose work serves us, especially as we enter a more global economy.

If we could, if we would, we would see the faces of far-away neighbors, many of whom are women and children, laboring long days for little money so that we can enjoy inexpensive clothing, coffee, and other comforts. The search for cheap labor has often driven jobs out of neighborhoods and nations that relied on them. The low prices of the products are preserved but the jobs aren't.

Micah spoke with the intention of improving life for the *should-haves* and the *haves*. All are people of God. People suffering economic hardship are also sisters and brothers in the faith. During the past 60 years, the global center of Christianity has shifted from a concentration in Northern Europe and North America to the Southern Hemisphere. Now the majority of Christians live in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. So do the majority of the world's poor.

Most of us have worked hard for the nice things we have. And, as Christians, we may be especially concerned about our impact on others. Nevertheless, our standard of living is luxurious from a global perspective. Although the United States contains less than 6 percent of the world's population, we consume 45 percent of the world's resources. Even though we may do many good things with what we have, do we really need all that we have? There are not enough resources on the planet for every person to enjoy the abundance of the U.S. lifestyle.

The result is that the gulf between the rich few and poor many is greater now than at any other time. This is true for the world, and for our own country, the wealthiest on the planet. As was true in Micah's day, the system is definitely out of balance. To help us gain perspective, we should consider the fact that some of the women in the international women's Bible study now have electricity and running water for the first time in their lives. In some cases, their modest seminary housing provides better accommodations than any dwelling in their entire home village!



4. Have you ever had the experience of being with people who were far wealthier than you are? What was it like? What feelings did you experience—appreciation, awe, envy, anger, awkwardness?

ENOUGH

Having nice things is not in itself a bad thing, but how we attain them and what place they have in our lives are the issues. Micah and the other prophets invite us to find a balance of *enough*—enough comfort to provide dignity and enough simplicity to recognize the blessings of God.

For many people in the United States, balance is missing. The explosion of rental storage spaces may be a sign that we have more than enough. “The good life” has in essence become “the *goods* life.” There is even a term for the malady of too much, *Affluenza*. (See the March 1999 issue of *The Lutheran* for more on a PBS program by this name.)

5. List three things you own that you haven’t used for a long time—or ever! Why do you keep them? How might they be put to better use?

ENOUGH FOR JOY

The women in the international Bible study group describe their surprise, amusement, and sadness at the busy lives of many U.S. people, full of tasks and things, but missing much joy. They worry that their own lives, too, will take on the same characteristics and that their children will no longer be satisfied with the simple pleasures from home that were once enough for joy.

6. Do you know someone who is content with the basic necessities of life? How does that person add to your understanding of God’s vision of justice as “enough for all”?

7. How could you and your church community help encourage or foster a good balance of *enough*—enough work and enough leisure, enough room for justice in your life, enough beauty, enough peace, enough love?

GOD'S VISION OF JUSTICE: ENOUGH FOR ALL (4:1-4)

In stirring and familiar words Micah declares God's vision of justice and our hope for the days to come (see also Isaiah 2:2-4). Micah describes a new balance in the global order. His words are not only for the people of Israel but for all people everywhere. Life is transformed. Peoples and nations stream to the mountain of God to learn God's ways. Relationships to one another and to God are renewed. A striking metaphor catches our eye in Micah 4:4. Everyone, those accustomed to much and those who live with very little, will delight in the peasant's simple standard of living—a vine and fig tree—and it will be enough. Both of these plants take many years of cultivation before they mature and bear fruit. They imply a long-term presence in the land, and patience. We need that patience as we learn to be satisfied with enough.

Venturing into God's justice is a touchy thing, a challenge for any people. For most of us it can be particularly discomforting because we have many possessions and much power. We don't want to lose what we have earned through our hard work or wise investment. It is painful and difficult to consider that we have contributed to injustice. We are afraid to know too much about how we attained our comforts or how other people's lives are affected by our actions. But God wants us to know God and to enjoy the abundant life of faith.

It takes faith to be content with enough while we are bombarded by messages trying to convince us otherwise. Living God's justice invites us continually to examine our life and motivations with a patient confidence in God's promises. It takes a long time to beat swords into



plowshares. It takes courage. People will shake their heads. Find others who will encourage and support you. Study the Bible, especially the message of God's justice, with people less well off than you are. Letting God's justice shape our desires and attitudes prepares us to live God's justice in the world. It is the first step in the adventure of "walking humbly with God."

TRYING IT ON

The resource "Trek: Venture into a World of Enough" can help you. Developed by our partners in the Mennonite Central Committee, this 28-day study and reflection guide helps thoughtful Christians begin and maintain a commitment to living God's justice vision of "enough for all." It is designed for use with groups and individuals; we used it broadly at the seminary and with our Bible study group. Available through Mennonite Central Committee, 21 South 12th St., P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; Phone: 717-859-1151; Fax: 717-859-2171; Cost: \$5.

BLESSING

Sing WOV 730 or recite together the words of Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55. With these words we rejoice, as Mary did, that God uses us to bring into being the promised vision of enough for all. **LWT**

Stacy Kitahata is Dean of the Community at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

"Live God's Justice" is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Send questions and comments to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

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LOOKING AHEAD

In God's Image: A Study of Genesis, by Terence E. Fretheim, will first appear in the September 1999 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* and continue for nine sessions. For information about subscribing to *Lutheran Woman Today*, see page 65. For information about companion pieces for the Genesis study (Resource Book, Leader Guide, Companion Bible), see page 41.

Live God's Justice

SESSION 1



What is God's justice?

OPENING

Begin by welcoming everyone to this study. Read the prayer on page 24 together.

THE PROPHET'S CRITIQUE

Question 1, page 26: Invite a volunteer to read Micah 2:1-5. Ask participants to respond individually with the words they circled in answering this question. Ask them if there's a word or two they'd like to add to the list. Call the group's attention to the word *devise*, a form of which appears in verses 1 and 3. Note how the prophet says the tables will be turned. Those who devise evil against others will now have evil devised against themselves! God is serious about wanting us to act justly with all our neighbors.

Question 2, page 26: While those who are oppressed would feel supported—for they hear that someone is coming to their aid—those to whom the prophecy is addressed would be threatened by Micah's message.

Question 3, page 26: Answers to this question will vary, of course. Ready answers might be people who can afford to help others but don't, and CEOs earning multi-million-dollar salaries while their companies lay off workers.

Try to probe for more subtle answers as you get into the second part of the question. We all have times when we ignore the plights of other people for the sake of our own goals and gain—whether those situations are financial, emotional, or spiritual. And we all have times when we

SESSION 1

pages 24-30

SESSION 2

pages 35-40

Hint: If you pull out *IdeaNet*, you can easily remove these pages of leader helps (pages 31-34).

are attentive and responsive to the needs of others.

Ask for stories. Perhaps some in your group have been involved in hands-on ministries like Habitat for Humanity projects, or special activities to support World Hunger. Ask any who have been involved to share how the experience of aiding another affected them.

SEEING CLEARLY

Question 4, page 28: To try to create empathy for those who have less wealth, you might ask for experiences or stories to help answer this question.

ENOUGH

Question 5, page 28: One approach would be to set the stage by showing something of yours that hasn't been used in a long time—a yogurt maker or fondue pot, for example. Ask people to share stories about preparing for a garage sale or getting ready to move.

For another approach, go further with the question and focus on the insight that "the good life" has become "the goods life" (p. 28). Ask: How can we keep from buying things we want but don't need? See articles about possessions in the October 1998 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* for ideas and further discussion.

ENOUGH FOR JOY

Question 6, page 28: Ask for stories here. Offer a description of

a person you know whose simple lifestyle and attitude you admire and tell how it affects you.

Question 7, page 29: Begin by making some suggestions yourself. You could offer classes on simple living, make books available, start a small group, or look at your congregation's practices of recycling and energy use. For those who want further follow-up, suggest they contact "Alternatives for Simple Living," P.O. Box 2857, Sioux City, IA 51106, or call 712-274-8875, or 800-821-6153. Web site: www.SimpleLiving.org

GOD'S VISION OF JUSTICE ENOUGH FOR ALL

God's vision of justice is a clear call for us to see that we live in community together. And that all that we have is a gift and blessing from God—to be freely shared among the community. In that way not only is there enough for all, but there is God's abundant life for all.

Bonus question: As time allows, ask group members to describe their vision of the "abundant life" (see John 10:10).

TRYING IT ON

"Trek—A Venture into the World of Enough" is a faith-and-action Bible study that works well with both youth and adults. Why not plan an intergenerational study? To order from the Mennonite Central Committee, call 717-859-1151 or send a fax to 717-859-2171. Cost: \$5. 

IdeaNet

July/August 1999 • Vol. 2, Number 10

For Mission Together

Potluck Potpourri

It was a rite of passage. I was 22 years old and about to attend the first congregational potluck lunch where I'd be bringing a dish to share.

I took it all very seriously. What should I make? I called Mom. I looked through cookbooks. Then I happened upon a grocery-store special on eggs. Perfect! I made *mean* deviled eggs.

That potluck at Our Savior's Lutheran in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, stands out in my memory as the best ever. The tables were overflowing with potluck abundance. And my plate of deviled eggs emptied immediately. I felt affirmed, accepted, *adult*.

A month later there was another potluck lunch at Our Savior's. I don't remember what I brought, but I do remember that four others brought deviled eggs. Happy day!

Not everyone has happy potluck stories. One woman tells of the pan of brownies she brought to her new congregation. They were never set out; she took home the full pan. Another remembers getting chewed out in the church kitchen because she cut the pickles "the wrong way."

There are *potlucks* and there are *shared dinners*. With potlucks you eat what comes. With shared

dinners someone makes sure there's a reasonably balanced menu selection. I prefer the potluck; I think of it as a faith thing. (*If you hold it, food will come.*) Most of us will not suffer if one meal is heavy on gelatin.

My congregation now, St. Luke's in Park Ridge, Illinois, carries on a fine potluck tradition. I notice a graceful acceptance of homemade, take-out, and carry-in offerings. Many tell my husband, for example, that they appreciate the fresh-fruit salad that he brings to potlucks (directly from the grocery store).

When we first joined St. Luke's, there were a few times when potluck assignments were announced in the bulletin. For example, "Last names beginning with A through E bring a salad and a dessert." The two-item expectation made me a little grumpy: when my family sees a two-item dinner at home, they look around for company. I admit my personal pettiness to illustrate the possible ramifications of potluck procedure.

In the end, though, potlucks are not about the food or the procedure; they're about community. And that's delicious.

Sue Edison-Swift
Managing editor, LWT

Postcard Ideas

Potluck with a flair

For our January annual-meeting potluck we had a baked-potato and taco bar. Potatoes were baked in the church ovens, and soft taco shells were warmed. Members were asked to bring toppings, salads, or desserts. The meal was a big success and a variation on the standard potluck fare.

Pat Huselhorst

Atonement Lutheran

New Brighton, Minn.

A birthday emphasis

Our church has a potluck lunch the first Sunday of each month after our 10:30 service. At this potluck we always have a birthday cake to honor the members who have a birthday that month.

Adding this feature to our potluck has helped build up the attendance. One person is in charge of setting up and accepting the food as it is brought in before the service.

Bertha Wheeler

Faith Lutheran

Pioneer, Calif.

Organizing potlucks

When we have a potluck meal at church, we divide up the duties among our three circles (one to set up, one to serve the meal, and one to clean up). This plan always works out well.

Here's a recipe for Mexican lasagna that has been very popular at our potlucks:

Mexican Lasagna

1 lb. lean ground beef
1 can (16 oz.) refried beans
2 tsp. dried oregano
1 tsp. ground cumin
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. garlic powder
12 uncooked lasagna noodles
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups water
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups salsa
2 cups (16 oz.) sour cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely sliced green onions
1 can (22 oz.) black olives, sliced (optional)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated cheese

Combine beef, beans, oregano, cumin, and garlic powder. Place four of the lasagna noodles in bottom of 13" x 9" x 2" baking pan. Spread half of beef mixture over the noodles. Top with four more noodles and remaining beef mixture. Cover with remaining noodles. Combine water and salsa. Pour over all. Cover with foil. Bake at 350 degrees for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours or until noodles are tender. Combine sour cream, onions, and olives. Spoon over casserole and top with cheese. Bake uncovered until cheese is melted (about 5 minutes).

Shirley Westby

First Lutheran

Sheyenne, N.D.

Sharroll Says

In the past three years while I have been president, I have tried to connect my vision to the work of Women of the ELCA in the church, society, and the world. Now, as I complete my term in office, I am reflecting upon the things that I have learned and need to share. Things that need to be said.

Recently, I was traveling to Canada and forgot my passport. My oversight created embarrassment, anxiety, and delays. Even though I had known I should bring my passport, I needed someone to say, "Sharroll, don't forget your passport."

What I am going to share with you are things you probably already know. You may well think they are "givens," but from my perspective, they need to be said.

1 **Thank you.** Thank you for your partnership. Thank you for your offerings. Thank you for your affirmation and prayers. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

2 It is a myth that because you are working with wonderful Christian women, you have an easy job. In reality it is **hard work**. Each woman we interact with brings a unique perspective, and ensuring that the voices of all are heard is hard work. Understanding others and empowering them were at the center of Jesus' life.

3 We must have **vision**. Proverbs 29:18 reads, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." I believe that with my whole heart. But our vision must

be Jesus' vision. We must have a vision of working for something beyond ourselves.

4 When one has a vision, it must be repeated again and again. We must **live the vision**.

5 We are about the business of **planting seeds**. Most of us would like to gather bouquets, but we are to be planting seeds. We would like to see tangible things that we can point to and enjoy. But seeds grow slowly sometimes, and we may never see the fruits of our labor.

6 When we deal in matters of growth in faith, ministry, and action, we need to **think deeply** and widely. It is tempting to look at numbers and attach success to them, but we all know that Jesus

IdeaNet

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was about a faith that was deep and wide.

7 Love. No matter what we have accomplished, if we have not loved, we have not accomplished our goal.

8 Our decisions need to be made for the **good of the whole church**. We function corporately for a reason: when we pool our thoughts, energy, and creativity, we accomplish more than we could individually. And we must remember that Jesus Christ chose to work through the church.

9 Keep your expectations high. When my curling iron died in early December, my husband

asked if I would like one for Christmas. I said, "No." Quite frankly, I had greater expectations for my Christmas gift. People rise to the occasion, so keep your expectations high.

10 Focus on the positive. Do not waste energy on the negative. (Obviously, this is easier said than done.) When we all are working together, pulling together, and praying for the same thing, nothing can hold us back.

These things are not new. They just need to be said.

*Sharroll Bernahl
President
Women of the ELCA*

We need your ideas! Please keep those postcards coming! Here are the topics for upcoming issues:

Be-there Events

Does your congregational unit sponsor, lead, or coordinate an event that you look forward to, plan for, wouldn't miss? What is it? What makes it popular? What makes it work?

Due August 2, 1999

ways to provide child care during unit meetings? How do you deal with the comings and goings of those who winter or summer elsewhere? How has your group welcomed women of different cultures or women with disabilities?

Due November 1, 1999

Ecumenical Partnerships

How has your Women of the ELCA unit interacted with women in other denominations or other faiths? Tell us about it!

Due September 1, 1999

Extending the Family

How does your group involve college-age and other young women? Any suggestions on

**Send all
Postcard
Ideas**

to

Women of the ELCA IdeaNet
8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631-4189
Email: IdeaNet@elca.org

Live God's Justice

SESSION 2

How do we live justly?

WITNESS TO THE COVENANT

Question 1, page 36: Invite a volunteer to read Micah 6:1-5. Suggest that participants pay special attention to verses 4-5 as they think privately about what God has done for them. Then invite people to share their thoughts if they wish. God is busy and active in all our lives, and this question gives opportunity for participants to identify, and give witness to, the good and gracious things God does for them. Give an example from your own life.

SESSION 1
pages 24-30
SESSION 2
pages 35-40

Hint: If you pull out *IdeaNet*, you can easily remove these pages of leader helps (pages 31-34).

THE PEOPLE RESPOND

Question 2, page 36: Invite a volunteer to read Micah 6:6-7. The list includes: burnt offerings, calves a year old, thousands of rams, 10,000 rivers of oil, and the firstborn child. Go one step further. Ask the group to imagine Micah prophesying to an audience today. Instead of rivers of oil, what might people say they'll give up to assure God that they're "not really greedy." Give ideas to prime the pump ("my credit card," "my condo time-share in Florida in the winter," or "going to the shopping mall for a month").

Question 3, page 36: Read Micah 6:8. We are required to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Ask the group to quiet themselves and open their Bibles to Micah 6:8. Go around the group and have each read the verse from their Bible. After each reader, the group could say, "Lord, have mercy."

Question 4, page 37: Begin with private reflection, or move right into discussion—whichever seems best for the group. This question brings the discussion in question 2 into a personal framework. Answers will vary—receive and accept all responses. If you wish, go further and ask how as we mature—in faith and years—our responses might change. What do those changes tell us about ourselves? About our God? Talk about the answers.

Question 5, page 37: Encourage thinking beyond “just money.” Invite participants to reflect on life choices and lifestyles. Our offerings—both time and talent—contribute to the work of the gospel—from paying the congregation’s light bills to supporting food programs and mission endeavors. Your contributions to Women of the ELCA support many excellent ministries. The women’s organization, with its strong emphasis on women and children in crisis—especially on those in poverty—shows that Micah 6:8 is being taken very seriously. Ask for examples of such ministries supported from those in your group. Ask them what it means to them that the triennium theme for 1999-2002 for Women of the ELCA is “Live God’s Justice.”

WHAT IS ENOUGH?

Question 6, page 38: Offer a story of your own about a gift precious to you. Do the stories have common themes? For example, were many of the stories about a gift from a child?

GIVING FROM ABUNDANCE

Question 7, page 38: Many biblical stories could work here. The Exodus story is certainly a major example. So are the many wonderful stories of Jesus’ healing, like the story of the woman with an issue of blood (see Matthew 9), whom Jesus restored to the community with his act of mercy. Or Jesus’ story in Luke 18 of the persistent widow who wore down an “unjust judge” and merited God’s pleasure, as an example of how God will act for justice on behalf of God’s chosen people. Ask for participants’ stories, too.

WALKING HUMBLY

Question 8, page 39: How might the group gathered to do this study covenant to support each other’s efforts to walk humbly? Invite people to share any experience they have with international study trips, or experience with an ELCA companion synod.

THE JOURNEY TO JUBILEE

Jubilee 2000 is a special opportunity to live out Micah 6:8. See “Proclaim Jubilee: Break the Chains of Debt” and “Want to change the world? Write a letter!” in this issue for fuller information on Jubilee 2000 and for specific action you can take.

Bonus question: Have you written your letter of advocacy (see pp. 12-15)? Bring your letter of advocacy to the Women of the ELCA Fourth Triennial Convention in St. Louis (July 8-11, 1999) or send it with someone who will attend the convention. Or you can mail it directly to your congressional representative or senator. *LWT*

Live God's Justice

Stacy Kitahata



SESSION 2

How do we live justly?

STUDY TEXT

Micah 6:1-5 God's case against the people

Micah 6:6-8 A call to justice

SESSION 1
pages 24-30

SESSION 2
pages 35-39

**LEADER
GUIDE**
pages 31-34

MEMORY VERSE

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

(Micah 6:8)

OPENING

Sing or read "My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness" (WOV 730) or read together the words of Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55. We close Session 1 and open this session with the same words. We claim Mary's song as our own. Like Mary, we are invited to offer our whole life, body and soul, to "magnify the Lord," so that the promises of God are fulfilled.

WITNESS TO THE COVENANT

Read Micah 6:1-5. In this text, the prophet Micah calls the mountains, the hills, and the whole earth to witness the controversy that God has with the people.



When the participants in the International Women's Bible Study read Micah 6:1-5, they recognized a familiar practice. In Burma, for example, if two neighbors have a conflict, the community calls them out to an open space, surrounded by the hills. A bit of earth is mixed with water, and both parties drink the mixture. It is believed that the person who is wrong will become ill, while the offended party will suffer nothing. Although it may sound like superstition, the practice does recognize that our actions have implications beyond ourselves. In fact, the whole earth is affected.

In the presence of the hills the prophet recounts God's faithfulness to the people through their long history together. Reminding them of their covenant relationship, God calls the people to return to a closer walk together. The poetic form used here is a "prophetic covenant lawsuit" (see also Amos 3:3-8 and Hosea 4:1-6).

1. Read Micah 6:1-5 again. Imagine that Micah is speaking about God's relationship with you. How would Micah recount God's faithfulness in the covenant relationship with you? What have been God's "saving acts" in your life?

THE PEOPLE RESPOND

A new voice enters the story, the voice of the people responding to God, trying to make up for not walking with God.

2. Read Micah 6:6-7. The people try to imagine what might make things right. What do they list in these verses?

3. Now read Micah 6:8. What do they hear are the required things to do to make things right with God?

4. How have you responded to this desire to be right with God? What have you done? What in your life has resembled the suggestions in Micah 6:6-7, and what has been more like 6:8?

5. How do your offerings reflect a commitment to living God's justice? How do your church's offerings reflect a commitment to God's justice?

Notice that in verses 6 and 7, the people suggest ever-escalating offerings, one greater and more sacrificial than the next, from burnt offerings to 10,000 rivers of oil. The people consider making offerings of wealth and abundance, as though God would be satisfied with what satisfies us! Yet not so hidden in these suggestions is a recognition that even these are not enough.

WHAT IS ENOUGH?

God invites us to be satisfied with enough, with the enough-ness that satisfies God. In Luke 21:1-4 and Mark 12:41-44, Jesus gives us a model of enough in the woman who gave little in absolute terms, but who was incredibly generous. She is contrasted with a man who gave much more from his material abundance. Their offerings demonstrated the disposition of their hearts.

One of the women in the Bible study group returned to her home country after sharing her life with us for several years. There were many parties and gifts to send her on her way, but among the most precious was a painstakingly hand-embroidered cloth. Another woman from the group, a country woman, mother of four, stayed up all night to complete the delicate flowers that twined along the border. She described selecting each color for its significance and beauty. Each stitch was made with care. It was the most treasured of all the gifts.

6. Reflect on an experience you've had giving or receiving a precious gift that had little monetary value. What were your reactions to the experience? How was the experience different from a more usual gift exchange?

GIVING FROM ABUNDANCE

Micah reminds us that God wants offerings not from our abundance of wealth but from an abundance of love. In Micah 6:7 the speaker wonders what should be brought before God, “my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” God does not require such a sacrifice. God is not pleased with victims of any kind. Rather God yearns for abundant life for all!

In Micah 6:8, we discover God’s view on abundance and what is enough. For us to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God” are enough for God. All three things taken together are what God requires. They are three dimensions of a life of faithfulness, not a checklist, but a dynamic whole.

Our faithfulness and justice are to reflect God’s faithfulness and justice. Out of God’s loving-kindness (in Hebrew, *hesed*) God brought the people out of bondage and slavery and declared a redistribution of wealth and power. Jesus walked humbly among the people carrying out a ministry of loving-kindness. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all creation, women and men, young and old, so that we might continue “to bring good news to the poor, ... proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, Isaiah 61:1-2, Joel 2). The Bible is the history of God’s loving-kindness creating justice for God’s people, especially for the poor and oppressed.

7. Think of a Bible story that shows God’s loving-kindness creating justice for God’s people. Can you think of such a story from your own life or the life of someone you know of?

WALKING HUMBLY

In Micah 4:2, God's vision of *enough* invites all people to study God's ways and walk in them. Walking humbly with God means joining God in solidarity with the most vulnerable. We are transformed to love with compassionate tenderness, and we become vulnerable ourselves.

This is what it means to do justice. Our relationship with God and with our neighbors is renewed. We know the joy and contentment of enough.

But being transformed by faith can be frightening. We wonder: How do we know where God will lead us? Can we trust that God will provide enough? In spite of the promises of abundant life, our hope can begin to falter when we face the unknown.

8. Who are your companions on the justice way—people with whom you can share encouragement and support? How might you connect with people of different cultures and backgrounds to enrich the discovery of God's way?

THE JOURNEY TO JUBILEE

In our last session we explored God's vision for justice, a world of enough for all. Leviticus 25 describes one strategy for moving toward such a world, the *jubilee*. Scholars have debated whether the biblical jubilee was an actuality in Israelite society. Whether or not it was regularly practiced in its entirety, we can recognize that the just redistribution of land and right relationships with neighbors reflect God's desire for equity among all people. Some also suggest that this idea of jubilee is the "year of the Lord's favor" that Jesus declared was being fulfilled in him.

People of faith around the world are calling for a year of jubilee now. In a world with an increasing chasm between the very wealthy and the desperately poor, the principles of jubilee—redistribution of land, resolution of debts, and freedom—are most welcome. As we learned in the first session, those living God's justice recognize the interrelationship of our lives with the lives of our

neighbors around the world. We are called to act on behalf of the millions of people suffering from poverty and oppression. As Christians together, we hold one another accountable for responding to God's instruction to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Together we can make a world of difference that would be impossible if we acted separately.

One way to do justice is through the Jubilee 2000/USA program. The ELCA is part of this worldwide movement, based on the biblical principles of jubilee, to cancel the crushing international debt of desperately poor countries by the new millennium. To learn more about Jubilee 2000, see "Proclaim Jubilee: Break the Chains of Debt" on pages 16-19, and "Want to change the world? Write a letter!" on pages 12-15.

BLESSING

In the late 1980s when the church in El Salvador was experiencing its most horrific persecutions, concerned North American Christians asked Medardo Gomez, a Lutheran bishop, "What can we do?" Bishop Gomez recounted the story of the boy beset by a demon that only Jesus could expel (Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-43a). The bishop responded, "Pray, pray without ceasing and God will show you what your fast should be." Pray together, for one another, for your sisters and brothers on the way, for God's discernment and wisdom. Pray that God will show you your fast, your next step on the journey to jubilee.

CLOSING

"To Israel, your servant blest, your help is ever sure; the promise to our parents made their children will secure. Sing glory to the Holy One, give honor to the Word, and praise the Pow'r of the Most High, one God, by all adored." (WOV 730, stanza 3) **LVT**

Stacy Kitahata is Dean of Community at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

"Live God's Justice" is prepared by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and edited by Catherine Malotky. Send questions and comments to Barbara Hofmaier, director for educational resources, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

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Introducing the new LWT Bible study

In God's Image: A Study of Genesis, by Terence E. Fretheim, is the nine-session Bible study to appear in the September 1999 through May 2000 issues of *Lutheran Woman Today*. *Genesis* is a book about a world lovingly and stunningly created by God. It is also about the people who inhabit that world and about how God is at work and present among us.

SUBSCRIBING TO LWT

You will need a subscription (10 issues per year) to *Lutheran Woman Today* to do the *Genesis* Bible study. LWT comes in three versions: digest size, big-print format, and audiotape (for the visually impaired). New subscription orders and payments received by **July 12** will begin with the September issue. **For subscription information see the insert, page 65, or call 800-426-0115, ext. 639.**

COMPANION RESOURCES

Those who do the LWT Bible study in a group, and those who want to dig deeper, will want to order the companion resources available to enhance and enrich the study of *In God's Image*, including ...

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LWT**

Choosing the good part

P. K. McCary



You know the story, but let's listen in again on Mary, Martha, and Jesus (Luke 10:38-42, New King James Version).

Martha: *"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."*

Jesus: *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*

Vindication? So my sister Marys would have you think. Chastisement? Victimization? My sister Marthas would have you believe it so. It's none of the above. The words of Jesus echo a powerful sentiment: if we work at choosing the good part, our lives will be fulfilling and whole. For Mary and Martha live in each of us. We all wrestle with the challenges of life: relationships, responsibilities, work, and study. When we come to crossroads, whether to clean the house or write an article, for instance, we often choose what we feel *others* would think is the good part. Suppose someone comes by in the middle of this chaos? They will think I'm a bad mother, a poor housekeeper, and a down-right poor excuse for a woman. Won't they? *They* will think less of me because at this moment sitting at this desk while trying to write this article, I'm really thinking about the dirty dishes in the sink.

Martha: *"I can't believe with all I've done
She sits there lovingly at his feet.
Doesn't she realize there's work to be done
And, for the Lord's sake, dinner to complete?"*

Mary: *"How can she stand it, cooking and cleaning
When Jesus walks through the door?
His words pouring like rain so soft—
Just enough to make you want more."*

Can you hear Martha? Do you feel Mary? I hear Martha's voice when inconvenienced by a sister who goes on another business trip when I need her. I'm not thinking that she is doing the good thing at that moment because she is not doing a good thing *for me*. When I listen with Martha's ear, I feel sorry for myself. When I listen with Mary's ear, I feel guilty.

The "Mary and Martha" lesson opens the door to discussions of all the women of the Bible. That Jesus answered at all is a testament to his concern for us as women. Jesus wants us to find the good part. Look at what he does. He could have dismissed Martha for the "woman thing," or dismissed Mary for not knowing her place. Yet Jesus responds to the needs of each: *Martha, stop feeling victimized, and Mary, don't you dare feel guilty.*

If you listen carefully, you can hear them talking—and they are talking to us. And not just Mary and Martha. Some women of the Bible have solid and firm voices. Others speak softly so that one must strain to hear. All, however, have voices we can hear and identify with. I hear Martha's and Mary's voices often. My friends and col-

leagues have been one or the other. The story must be finished by us. As Martha, we slip off our apron and sit with Mary. As Mary, we get up and help out so that we both can have time to sit at the master's feet.

Carry it a step further. In the light of day, we can follow our dreams and support others as they follow theirs. Different women follow different paths—each is seeking the good thing. Even when we stumble and fall, we can hold each other, not with condemnation but with grace. The same grace Jesus shows us each day.

Martha (whispering): "He's wonderful, isn't he? I could listen to him all day. Could you peel these potatoes while you listen?"

Mary: "Sure, sister. But, after supper, leave the dishes. I'll help you later. You should hear what he has to say."

OK, so I'm taking a few liberties, but it could happen. The story of Mary and Martha is one we should finish, supporting and caring for one another as we work at choosing the good part of our lives. Who knows? When we get this, we can reconcile our differences about other things, too. It's what Jesus had in mind all along. **LWT**



P. K. McCary is an author and storyteller. A member of Augustana Lutheran in Houston, Texas, she conducts workshops on the women of the Bible using her play, *Straight From the Rib: Dialogues with Biblical Women*. She will "weave" stories at the Women of Color Gathering in St. Louis, July 5-7, 1999.

Sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all

A social statement on economic life

Karen L. Bloomquist

*In whom
do we
place our
trust?*



Voting members at this summer's Churchwide Assembly (August 15-22, in Denver, Colo.) will take official action on an ELCA social statement on economic life. The process began in 1994 as members of the Task Force on Economic Life went out to 20 "listening posts" around the United States to hear ELCA members talk about the economic realities they face and the role of the church.

During 1997 many congregations discussed and responded to the study book *Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*. Their input helped shape the first draft of the social statement "Toward Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All," which was sent to all congregations in the spring of 1998. Last fall, hearings were held throughout the ELCA on the first draft. Informed by what was expressed at these hearings, as well as hundreds of written responses, the proposed social statement is now ready. It emphasizes these points:

- What we as a church confess in relation to economic life.
- What we as a church commit ourselves to and urge members to do.
- What we call for in the wider society.

You can request a single copy of the proposed statement by calling the ELCA's Department for Studies (800-638-3522, ext. 2715) or you can download it from the Web site: www.elca.org/dcs/economic.html

A SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED SOCIAL STATEMENT

Economic matters are pervasive in our lives, and people often feel powerless in the face of economics. The power, scope, and influence of economic thinking and practices can feel godlike in how they rule over our lives. This raises central theological questions: In what or in whom do we place our trust? How are certain economic assumptions in conflict with what we as a church confess? How are Christian identity, freedom, and hope rooted in Jesus Christ rather than in economic success or failure? What is the relationship between God's reign of justice and the economic injustices we face?

Economic life is intended to be a means through which God's purposes for humankind and creation are to be served. When this doesn't occur, as a church we cannot remain silent because of who and whose we are. We are called to seek changes in economic life in light of the biblically grounded imperative of sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all. This means giving attention to the scope of God's concern (for all), the means by which life is sustained (livelihood), what is needed (sufficiency), and a long-term perspective (sustainability).

All refers to all people and creation. The power of God's self-giving love transforms and challenges the church to stand with all who are overlooked because of greed—especially those who continue to live in poverty. Outrage over the plight of people living in poverty is a theme throughout the Bible. The social statement on economic life renews our commitment as a church to creative, multifaceted ways of addressing poverty. Changes are needed in policies and practices of trade, investment, government spending, and international debt, so that the poorest will benefit rather than being harmed.

Livelihood highlights themes of vocation, work, and human dignity. Our vocation is to seek what is good for people and the rest of creation in ways that glorify God and anticipate God's promised future. Strong families, neighborhoods, and schools are needed to prepare people for livelihood. In the face of competitive pressures and constant changes, this statement commits us as a church to deliberate together about the challenges people face in their work, to counsel and support those undergoing transitions, and calls for efforts to create

God calls us to a life of mutual generosity toward all our neighbors.

and retain jobs. Through our work we should be treated in ways consistent with our God-given dignity. This dignity should be reflected in hiring, compensation, and employee rights, to which this church (and related institutions) commits itself and calls other employers to do also. The income of low-paid workers should be raised or supplemented in order to move them out of poverty.

Sufficiency reminds us of the sharp contrast between those who do not have enough and those who have too much. This statement commits us as church to address why so many in our midst continue to live in poverty. God calls us to a life of mutual generosity toward all our neighbors.

We also expect the government to promote the common good and provide assistance for those unable to provide for their livelihood. Many of us have far more than we need, and we fall into bondage to what we have. Consumerism and accumulation become ends in themselves. Enormous disparities in wealth are scandalous. Large transnational corporations continue to grow in financial power and influence. These disparities need to be lessened, and large corporate interests need to be held more accountable to the whole human community.

Sustainability calls for efforts to ensure that natural and social systems will survive and thrive together over the long term. Attention must be given to the effects of economic activity on the well-being of both environment and human communities. Sustainability requires policies to help reverse environmental destruction. Sustaining agriculture as a means of livelihood involves addressing farmers' high risk-levels and the small proportion of the retail food dollar they typically receive. Sustainable development of low-income communities focuses on the communities' assets, the health and welfare of the residents, and on their plans for the future of their community and the environment. Investments should sustain not only businesses but also communities and the environment.

In the face of our weariness in pursuit of "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all," we as the church hear God's word and receive the sacraments. What we receive is sufficient; it does sustain us. We are strengthened to persist in the struggle for justice as we look forward to the coming of God's kingdom in all its fullness. **LWT**

*Karen L.
Bloomquist
is Director
for Studies at
the ELCA
Division for
Church in
Society, and
Associate
Professor of
Theological
Ethics at
Wartburg
Theological
Seminary.*

“Support without accountability leads to moral weakness. Accountability without support is a form of cruelty.”

Stan Basler, Director of Criminal Justice and Mercies Ministries, United Methodist Conference, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Restorative justice works

Virginia Mackey



Restorative justice does make a difference. It defines crime as *harm* rather than as a violation against the state. Its first priority is to hear the pain and help identify the needs of the person harmed—the victim. From a property or financial loss to a personal injury, the victim's sense of violation needs to be voiced and understood.

In the “Restoring Justice” video produced by the Presbyterian Church, residents of a retirement home had an opportunity to express to the offenders the terror

they experienced when a fire was set in a part of their building under construction.

There's a power in victim meeting with offender. It can be incredibly helpful in terms of achieving a greater sense of healing and closure.

Restorative justice's next priority is having the offender understand that the victim is a real person, and understand the impact of the crime on the victim and on the

larger community. Then the question of accountability looms large and the offender is asked, "What can you do to make amends?"

For example, if you're a juvenile who has vandalized property, what of value do you have that you could sell to make financial restitution? What about your new sneakers or your bicycle?

In Texas, Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle has a new approach to gangs: *Face thy neighbor*. "Earle thinks going eyeball to eyeball with neighbors will make more of an impression on offenders than another trip through the revolving door of the courthouse."*

The third priority of restorative justice is involvement of community members. Not only can they help express the effect of the harm on the community, but they also can help victims and offenders carry out the terms of their agreement. Victims need continuing support. Offenders often need mentors and help in changing their lives, as well as in carrying out the responsibilities to which they have agreed in resolving the specific incident of harm.

THE PROCESS

Restorative justice is a vision. It is something we work toward. It is carried out informally, such as when a police department, court, or correctional department is willing to divert a case to mediation, to a family-group conference, or to a community-accountability board.

Mennonites in Canada initiated victim-offender mediation in the early 1970s. The concept of creating "conferences" or "circles" is being tried—adapted from the models used by Native Americans, Aborigines of Australia, and Maori of New Zealand. These models are significant not only because all those involved take part, but also because following them renews our sense of a caring community. We support victims and confront offenders because we care about *both parties*—their well-being and their restored place in our community.

THE VALUES

Restorative justice is a dramatic contrast to retributive justice. The goal of retributive justice is the delivery of punishment. Many of us are convinced that punishment-based justice is counterproductive in reducing violence.

Restorative justice makes a difference because it is *participatory*. It gives victims and offenders ownership of their own conflict rather than relegating it to the government. In this way, it is energizing and empowering. It gives community members a sense of hope: they *can make a difference*.

Restorative justice is proactive. When we participate in problem-solving, we begin to question root causes. Thankfully, researchers are beginning to identify what works. Not surprisingly, what works is (1) prevention—such as prenatal care and parenting

*"Idea for gangs: Face thy neighbor," by Dave Harmon and Angela Shah. *Austin American-Statesman*, October 17, 1998.

skills, Head Start and other school programs, job-skills training, and employment opportunities, and (2) early intervention and expectations of accountability.

Restorative justice is satisfying. Measures of victim satisfaction are very high. Even the most recalcitrant offender has been known to say to a family member, victim, or community member, "I didn't know you cared. I'll try to do better." And skeptical police officers have been known to say, "That was a really satisfying experience."

Restorative-justice practitioners tend to evaluate their success based on levels of satisfaction rather than on statistics. What we can say is that agreements are reached in more than 95 percent of mediations when victim and offender are willing to meet. Measurements to date indicate that contracts are completed and recidivism is reduced.

Restorative justice is biblical, compassionate. Imagine the response of the Good Samaritan to the victim of a roadside robbery. Restorative justice seeks to model the unconditional love of the father (God) in the story of the prodigal son. It tries to live out its stated belief in the potential of redemption. Visualize God's putting a mark of protection on Cain, Moses, David, and Paul—all who caused human lives to be lost—and redeeming them to become leaders of their people. Think of Zacchaeus or the woman caught in adultery, and Jesus' trust that they could turn their lives around.

Restorative justice is biblical because it heeds prophetic chal-

lenges to address root causes and make economic and social justice a reality. It is most consistent, we believe, with the Hebrew ethic of *shalom*. It is the best English translation of the biblical equivalent of justice, which is *righteousness* or a making-right.

LIVING OUT GOD'S JUSTICE

Restorative justice asks us to "live God's justice." It draws on our spirituality. It helps us to learn about ourselves and to grow by being open-minded, vulnerable, willing to take risks, and committed to healing.

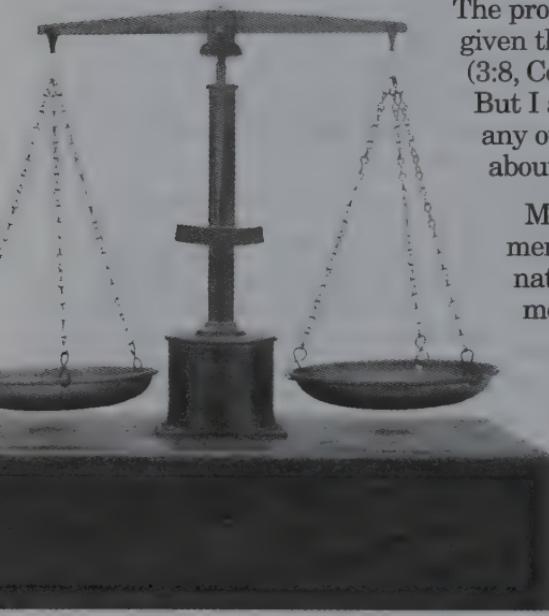
There is a crucial role for all people of faith in implementing philosophical and policy shifts toward restorative justice. The optimists among us predict that the new millennium will find us turning from rugged individualism and isolation to a recognition of our deep hunger for connectedness and community. Let's hold onto that sense of hope and each begin to live restorative justice where we are—at home, at work or school, in our congregations, and in our communities. **LWT**



Virginia Mackey, Golden, Colo., is retired from the National Religious Task Force on Criminal Justice. She chaired and staffed ecumenically based criminal-justice projects at the local, state, and national level.

One step for justice with mercy

Marj Leegard



The prophet Micah says, "I have been given the courage to speak about justice" (3:8, Contemporary English Version).

But I am not the prophet Micah, or any other prophet. So how can I speak about justice?

Micah says God "will settle arguments between distant and powerful nations" (4:3). I am never an instrument in those negotiations. And as for pounding swords and spears into rakes and shovels, I have never had swords and spears for serious pounding.

Surely justice is something I can wish for and pray for and hope for and speak for—but not something I *do*. After all, justice is done by the powerful—for

they have the power to make choices between justice and injustice. Micah relays the message that "at night you lie in bed making evil plans. And when morning comes you do what you've planned because you have the power" (2:1). But I have no power. I cannot oppress a whole people. I cannot oppress an entire gender. I cannot gather followers and equip them to go out to plunder. Nor do I wear the black robes of justice.

But just when I think I'm off the hook I read Micah 6:8: "The LORD has told us what is right and what he demands: 'See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God (CEV).'" Could it be that justice belongs to me, *to all of us*? It might be that I *am* capable of injustice, and any injustice is large.

I remember the common lament of childhood: "*It is not FAIR!*" And we knew the opposite of *fair*. It was *cheat*. If you did not follow the rules of a game you were a cheater. Now I remember: Justice has been a part of our thinking from childhood and is a large part of our daily lives.

On Sunday, February 7, 1999, *The Forum* (the newspaper from Fargo, N.D., and Moorhead, Minn.) carried a story of overwhelming justice tempered with mercy.

Liz Parrow's husband and daughter were on their way home from a church music practice and were killed by a now-convicted drunken driver. Where is justice? Where is fairness? Where is the split second that could have taken father and daughter out of the path of the hurtling truck? But Liz Parrow thought about the careless kid about to be sent to the penitentiary. She wanted to forgive him. She and others pleaded for mercy at his sentencing. And mercy was given.

The young man is jailed locally and released to work during the day. He and Liz Parrow are going together to talk to groups of people who need to hear what drinking and driving can do.

This is a powerful example of how God's call for justice and mercy was given voice in our time and place. Could it be that injustice rules and thrives when our sensibilities are so degraded by thoughts of retribution and retaliation that we cannot hear Micah's words resounding through our hardened standards of justice?

It is not enough to wish for justice. It does not help to close our eyes tightly when the nightly news portrays injustice with such clarity that we can taste and hear the agony. Injustice remains unless we see that justice is done.

Micah says, "... let mercy be your first concern" (6:8, CEV). Mercy and injustice are about as compatible as sardines and peanut butter. Mercy tempers our fears and allows us to do right. And doing right is sometimes risky, sometimes foolish, sometimes out-of-the-ordinary, and often inconvenient. Uncompromising punishment shouts, "Throw away the key!" Justice tempered with mercy whispers, "There is a better way." Amos and Micah taught a better way. Jesus shows us a better way.

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and hosts of others knew what God required and sought to walk that way one step at a time. That is what God asks of us, too. One step for justice with mercy. One step for what is right. One step for what is merciful. One step in obedience to God. We are not alone. There are a host of others walking beside us and behind us. We follow a path laid down by those who went before us.

The Lord has told us what is right. Now the Lord will give us courage to tell the world with words and deeds what is right and just and fair and merciful. **LWT**

LWT columnist Marj Leegard is a member of Bakke-Lund-Richwood parish in Detroit Lakes, Minn.



Project COPE ... A justice challenge

Linda Schroeder

Independence Day! Celebration! Unlocked gates.
An open door. No more guards. Freedom!

Maybe. But sometimes regaining freedom
seems like a trap. For example:

*Jackie, left,
with Sammy
Mayer who
remains
Jackie's best
friend several
years after
their official
partnership
ended.*

- When you've been in prison many years while the world has changed without you. Thomas panicked and backed off a city bus because he didn't know how to pay for the ride.
- When you've been forced into rigid prison routines, stripped of all choice and control. Cliff froze in the supermarket, overwhelmed by all the varieties; what cereal should he choose?
- When you've been dehumanized and brutalized. Tory still struggles against suicidal depression years after gang rape as a teenage inmate in a men's prison.
- When you've been out of the workforce a long time and have no marketable skills. During Mack's 35 years of incarceration, he never learned to read.
- When you've survived for years by stuffing your feelings and trusting no one. Charles explains: "I was afraid if you knew the real me you would cut me off, so I joked and laughed and pretended I had everything under control."
- When there's no such place as home. Anita's mom died last year, her siblings are drug users; she never knew her father.

Then freedom is a fantasy. And they cry, "Where is justice? Who will show us kindness? Will we ever be allowed to walk humbly with our God?"

In the course of such human events, we the people of **Project COPE** (Congregation/Offender Partnership Enterprise) hold these truths to be self-evident:

- The problems faced by many newly released ex-offenders are so overwhelming that crime-free independence seems impossible to achieve.
- Within any local congregation there are enough caring people and sufficient resources to help one ex-offender overcome such obstacles.

WHAT IS PROJECT COPE?

Project COPE is people power, radical hospitality, tangible reconciliation. Borrowing from the historic model of church support for refugees, Project COPE establishes congregation-based committees to provide holistic care for one selected ex-offender for one year. By assisting with time and tough love, transportation and job searches, housing and hope, food and friendship, the partnership team fosters competence and responsible citizenship. Since its inception, Project COPE—an independently chartered, not-for-profit, ecumenical organization—has had as many as 27 congregations involved in its ministry.

DOES IT WORK?

Ask Susan, who earned a college degree while parenting a teenage daughter

and directing an outreach ministry for an urban church. Ask John, the "jailhouse lawyer" now working for a local law firm. Ask Edward, entrusted with the key and security code for his new job as church custodian and leader of an outreach ministry for neighborhood kids. Ask Julia, newly hired as an assistant counselor for the drug-treatment program from which she recently graduated.

Confined two years or 20, for crimes ranging from embezzlement to murder, Susan, John, Edward, and Julia are among those who found Project COPE and got plugged into the power of grace.

DOES IT ALWAYS WORK?

Ask the partnership team grieving for Charles, who relapsed on drug use and went back to prison on a parole violation. Now he writes: "Instead of giving any of you a chance to help, I cut you all off. Please let everyone know that I'm sorry for letting them down. Thank you for what you did for me. It's great to know you're still by my side."

Discouraging? Heart-breaking? Frustrating? Indeed! But Charles



Julia recently graduated from her partnership and is now resident manager for Project COPE's transitional housing program.

knows that he is loved. He knows that we will not forsake him. Why? Because Project COPE is people who claim for themselves, just as Jesus did, the radical identity, mandate, and power of God's servant described in Isaiah 61:1: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners."

When Charles comes out of prison the next time, will there be a celebration? You'd better believe it! We'll be celebrating our *inter*-dependence, continuing our justice journey, walking humbly with each other and our gracious God. That's what Project COPE is all about. **LWT**



*Linda
Schroeder is
director of
Project COPE.
Her husband,*

*Ted, is pastor of Immanuel
Lutheran Church in St.
Louis, Mo.*

For more information,
you can call the
Project COPE office at
314-389-4804.

Land-mines update

An invitation to persist

Kathryn Wolford

Of all the deadly weapons that mock God's justice, anti-personnel land mines are the only ones triggered by the victim. Each month, land mines kill some 800 people and another 1200 people lose limbs to land mines. Most of these victims are civilians. They live in places where local churches, and organizations like Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran World Federation, respond to their tragic human toll.

On March 1, 1999, the treaty to ban the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel land mines went into effect. It has been signed by 133 countries and ratified by 64. The United States is not yet a signatory.

When the Lutheran anti-land mine petition effort was launched at the 1996 Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention, the goal was 67,000 signatures—one signature for every quilt sent that year by LWR to Angola, which was devastated by land mines. The goal was far surpassed, with a final tally of some **105,000 signatures** from all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Senator Patrick Leahy, a staunch advocate for the land-mine-ban treaty, plans to press for new legislation to mandate U.S. support for the treaty. LWR and the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) continue to monitor legislative proposals on this issue. Check our Web sites (see box) for updates and opportunities to voice your support for the treaty to Congress and the Clinton administration.

Because the U.S. government has not changed its position, some might say our efforts have failed and urge us to give up. However, in Luke 18 Jesus tells a parable to encourage his followers to pray always and not to lose heart. In the parable, an unjust judge got tired of a persistent widow. He finally declared, "... because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." The passage continues, "And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them'" (see Luke 18:1-8).

When I think about all the women made widows by land mines, or about all the women who have signed the land-mine petition, or about all the young girls growing up in land-mine-infested lands, I find myself wanting to be just like the persistent widow in the parable. How about you?

Our sincere thanks to Women of the ELCA for your leadership on this issue. You are giving hope and



encouragement to those who live with the daily reality of land mines and to all those who work for their elimination.

Thanks be to God! **LWT**

Kathryn Wolford is the president of Lutheran World Relief.

For more information and updates, contact Lutheran World Relief (LWR) and Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) through these Web sites: www.lwr.org and www.loga.org

Returning Our Land to the River

(After the Flood)

This prayer was offered after the author and her family lost their home in the flood of 1997 in North Dakota. On Good Friday of that year, they gathered with friends in West Fargo at the water's edge to remember and celebrate eight years of life on the Sheyenne River.¹

¹Reprinted with permission from *Sing Out New Visions*, © National Council of Churches, 1998.

God of Wonder, help us to find new learnings through our losses

and keep us faithful to our Gospel callings.

May the awesome power of the water's destruction be transformed into life-giving

energy that gives us courage to proclaim your strong presence in our lives.

As the water washes the land and cleanses its impurities, help us also to be washed daily in the waters of our Baptism,

refreshing us for Kingdom work in this time and place.

As the water seeks to create new channels and paths beyond its banks,

may we venture past

our safe boundaries and risk vulnerability.

Opening up hope

to those along our journey who need our love and care.

Like the swelling of the waters,

expand and deepen our capacity for compassion,

to love as you love, especially those among us who live with the pain of neglect and disregard.

Let your waters roll over this land with justice for people who are victims of poverty and injustice and who are pushed to the edge of life.

Help our eyes see with new delight the growth that comes when Creation springs anew,

Let our ears hear again the symphony of sound as nature blends its voices in praise of your work!

Help us touch hope with our hearts to feel
earth's pulses beating
with the bursting of spring's new buds.

As the river enriches the soil by depositing
nutrients as it flows,

may we feed on the richness of your Word

which gives nourishment to our souls and new rhythms
to our Kingdom work.

And as the moon is reflected on the waters in evening's
quiet moments,

may we be mindful that we are called to live each day
as a reflection of your heaven-born grace.

Above all, our Faithful God, we stand in your sure and
certain mercy,

confident that there is nothing in all of creation
that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

Amen. Amen. Amen. **LWT**

*Vicki Schmidt
West Fargo, North Dakota*

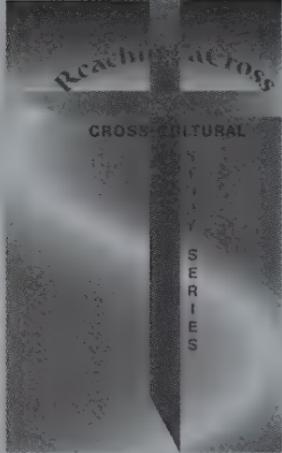
Sing Out New Visions

Many of us have known moments in our lives when we feel we have to work too hard to pray. But prayers do come and in an amazing variety at that. The new resource *Sing Out New Visions, Prayers, Poems, and Reflections by Women* is an ecumenical collection of prayers from women of all walks of life in the United States. Women in the ELCA are also contributors to this book with its beautiful reflective line drawings.

*Sing Out New Visions:
Prayers, Poems and*

Reflections by Women is designed for use in corporate worship as well as for personal and small-group meditation. Some 225 contributions are arranged into seven chapters: birthing, naming, teaching/learning, suffering, healing, celebrating, and witnessing for justice and peace. To order, call Augsburg Fortress, 800-328-4648. Cost is \$8 plus postage and handling. ISBN: 6-0001-0597-5.

*Jean Martensen
ELCA Commission for
Women*



Cross-cultural study series:

Reaching aCross

Cynthia A. Ishler

As 18 women from four parishes gathered to experience *Reaching aCross*, they really did not know what to expect. They were the first to take part in Women of the ELCA's cross-cultural study series. The first-year program focuses on "Making the

Reach," and affirms who we are within our own cultural experiences and invites us to be open to the experiences of others.

We were all surprised at the diversity at this half-day retreat. There was one woman in a wheelchair and one woman of color. Eight of the participants were over the age of 70, and seven were between 50 and 70 years old. When considering the primary dimensions of diversity (age, gender, ethnicity, race, physical abilities and qualities, and sexual/affectional orientation) the group discovered each had experienced, at one time or another, being on the majority side and being on the minority side of life experiences. Some shared about experiencing negative attitudes about their age and diminishing physical capabilities. In sharing our own experiences we learned from one another.

"I was surprised to learn that our world today was reflected in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman," remarked a participant. As the Bible study of John 4:1-15 progressed, folks made the connection between Jesus' attitude of openness and our own call to be open to others. We saw that the attitude of fear and rejection of those who are different has been around a long time. This was both discouraging—"This will never be fixed"—and encouraging—"Jesus left us an example to follow." As we looked anew at this well-known story, we gained insights into our own ways of being with those who are different.

One woman said her greatest learning was, "What we see as a failed attempt to reach out might be a great

Reaching aCross is Women of the ELCA's three-year cross-cultural study series. "Making the Reach" is the first year curriculum. Each year's series is comprised of a

Bible study, workshop, worship helps, and women's stories. These will be distributed one per congregation after the convention. For more information, contact Women of the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2746.

lesson and help us progress." Another learned "that only our faith can lead us into being open toward the needs of others who are different from us."

The workshop led us through a series of experiences that brought into focus the challenges of "making the reach." The program led us to crucial insights about our *filters* regarding difference—filters that come out of our life experiences. We learned that when we are aware of our filters, we more clearly see those around us.

Many of the women at the workshop were surprised to learn that people from the dominant culture have little motivation to *make the reach* across cultures because they are surrounded by what is familiar. Since most were able to identify themselves with the dominant culture, this was a real "aha" moment. Each understood that the gospel is what motivates us to be open to all the wonders of God's created world and people.

"Try, hope, keep learning, and praying. Keep my heart and mind open." These were some of the feelings expressed at the end of the day. This curriculum has great respect

for individual people—affirming their own reality while inviting them to reach beyond that reality toward those who have something other to give. By grace we experience the gifts of God's expansive creation, found within those who are like us and those who are different from us.

As one participant said: "*Making the reach* is what we do all the time in our families, as we try to understand our children and our parents: our own flesh and blood. Through Baptism, God makes us one family, all of us flesh and blood of the other. So *making the reach* is who we are as children of God." We hope that others will reach for this resource and share it with the women in their groups and with the entire congregation.

My thanks to the women of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Cleveland, Dr. Martin Luther Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Brooklyn, Ohio, and St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Parma, Ohio, for their loving and eager participation in this event. And thanks to Pastor Shari Ayers (Gloria Dei Lutheran Church) for sharing in the leadership. **LWT**



Cynthia Ishler is the pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Parma, Ohio.

“Now thank we all our God”



A thankoffering devotion

Jean Martensen

Leader We open our thankoffering devotion by singing together the first verse of “Now Thank We All Our God.” (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 533, 534)

Leader Let us pray. From of old you loved and sought us! Thanks be to you forever. Truth and justice you have taught us: thanks be to you forever! Amen. (*With One Voice* 790, verse 2)

During our thankoffering devotion we will reflect on the lives and witness of three remarkable, unnamed women. We find their stories in the Gospel of Mark. In these texts we see how Jesus intervenes when people are kept from fully participating in the human community.

Reader 1 The story of the woman who touched the robe of Jesus is told in the fifth chapter of Mark. (*Read Mark 5:25-34.*)

Reader 2 When the woman who edged closer to Jesus from behind touched the hem of his garment, she defied a religious and cultural taboo. In spite of the crowds, in spite of her status as a marginal person, and in spite of her being considered “unclean,” she touched his robe. But in risking reprisals, she revealed the depths of her faith. And Jesus responds with surprise at this daring: “Who touched me? Who took my power from me?” What power there is in touch! When people take risks and share deeply, they share power. After Jesus listens to her story, he acknowledges her faith with the assurance of wholeness. “Go in peace. Your faith has made you whole.”

Let us sing verse 2 of “Now Thank We All Our God.”

Acknowledgments: The three Bible commentaries are brief adaptations of longer studies in the publication *Restoring God’s Community of Men and Women: Bible Studies in Mark*. Available through Augsburg Fortress, 800-328-4648, for \$3 plus shipping and handling. The closing prayer is by Peggy Halsey and is reprinted from *Sing Out New Visions: Prayers, Poems and Reflections by Women*. Available from Augsburg Fortress; \$8 plus shipping and handling.

Reader 1 The story of the woman who talked back to Jesus is recorded in the seventh chapter of Mark. (*Read Mark 7:24-30.*)

Reader 2 Like the woman in the first story, this Syrophenician woman was not Jewish, as Jesus was. For Jews who strictly followed cultural tradition and biblical law, non-Jews were Gentiles or “dogs.” Dogs and swine were considered unclean animals and could therefore be used to characterize pagans. The story reveals the religious and racist oppression that the Syrophenician woman suffered. Moreover, since her daughter was afflicted and helpless, her status declined even further. Finally, because she was a woman, she was not worthy to be addressed by a man, much less a rabbi. But her love for her daughter gave her the courage she needed.

In the face of all kinds of pressures to remain silent and pitiable, this woman demonstrates dignity and self-assurance. She listens attentively to the arguments offered and refutes them. She speaks up and fights for the well-being of her daughter ... for the recognition of her humanity. For this Syrophenician woman, Jesus has only profound respect. In Mark, Jesus says, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.”

Let us sing the last verse of our hymn.

Reader 1 The story of the Widow’s mite is found in the 12th chapter of Mark. (*Read Mark 12:41-44.*)

Reader 2 The third story focuses on the widow’s mite and reveals again the power of Jesus to turn things upside down. Through the widow’s generosity, we see how God reverses the values of society and gives us new perspectives.

Widows at that time often lived desperate lives. Without sons, a widow would see her dead husband’s property pass to the nearest male relative. She would be expected to return to her own family or marry her husband’s brother, who would then support her. Her future was always precarious and beyond her control. Still the woman in this story resists anxiety. She does not succumb to the temptation to hoard the little she has. Instead, she drops in “two copper coins, which make a penny.”

This thankoffering devotion is offered for Women of the ELCA programs. Find a thankoffering service to use during Sunday worship in *Women of the ELCA Stewardship*, an annual resource mailed to every ELCA congregation. Questions? Call Valora Starr Butler, program director for stewardship and evangelism, at 800-638-3522, ext. 2741.

**Reader 2
(cont.)**

Lest anyone diminish the importance of the gift, Jesus quickly reminds them of the difference between those who are rich and can afford to give much and those who have little and give it all. “For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.” We all know such women, many of them widows in our time, who—with little fanfare and no “places of honor at feasts”—continue to give generously out of their poverty so that others might have what they need to live.

COLLECTION OF THANKOFFERINGS

(During the offertory, a hymn may be sung.)

Leader

In these Bible stories we see again God’s capacity for fresh encounters. When Jesus invited women into the community of faith nearly 2000 years ago, he broke society’s rules. Jesus called for new relationships. And in response to this remarkable teacher from Galilee, these three women and millions of others since that time have dared to do things they had not done before.

The three women in these stories in Mark’s gospel sought out Jesus. They confronted. They risked derision and censure as they defended the sick and vulnerable and shared what little they had with others.

As we continue to reflect on the stories of these women, let us be mindful of women who have touched our lives in similar ways. Let us give thanks for those women with whom we have served in great joy. And let us remember with gratitude those who have cared about us when we were too tired or too angry or too sad to care about ourselves.

As we say the following prayer together, let us each read aloud a phrase and end wherever there is a star (*); the person next to us will continue until the next star ... until the whole prayer is read. Allow a little time between each verse so that we can really imagine the women mentioned in this prayer of thanksgiving and be aware of all that God has entrusted to us.

Let us pray.

Leader and All

We give you thanks, O God, for the witness of all those unsung women in our time who work for justice in quiet

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ways,* who make paths where no paths existed before and never receive thanks,* and who keep on keeping on when everyone else has succumbed to weariness, cynicism, or despair.*

(pause for reflection)

Thank you for women who volunteer in homeless shelters and soup kitchens,* who rock AIDS babies and tutor migrant children,* who provide transportation, food, and love, and who will do it all again tomorrow.*

(pause for reflection)

Thank you for women who serve on school boards and community councils,* who run for political office because they believe leaders should be accountable* who march in demonstrations* and stand vigil outside corporate board-rooms.*

(pause for reflection)

Thank you for women who survive violence and abuse, harassment and discrimination* and then go on to form organizations and work countless hours* to create a world where other women and children will not face similar horrors;*

(pause for reflection)

Thank you for women who work on farms and as airline attendants* for child-care workers and baby-sitters, for waitresses and school-bus drivers,* nurses and teachers, and for all others whom we entrust each day* with our children, our homes, our food supply, our health and safety, and our futures* but whom we rarely really see, much less thank.*

(pause for reflection)

Pour out your blessings on these sisters, O God.* Give them rest when they are weary, hope when they despair, and companions when they are lonely.* For their steadfast courage and faithful witness* reward them with human words of gratitude and with your peace like a river in their souls.

All Amen.

*Jean Martensen is director for studies and leadership,
ELCA Commission for Women.*

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Underlines

WAYS TO USE LWT

The **June** and **July/August 1999** issues of LWT offer a number of stimulating ideas for personal or group devotions or for discussion starters.

Here's one: Sue Edison-Swift's "Editor's note" in the **June** issue (p. 5). Read the paragraph "Last acts" and ask what changes you would make if you learned that you had only a year to live. What an exercise. And how inspiring is Sue's testimony about her mother's life!

Or read the section "Things that last." All of us can benefit from "keeping a time diary"—analyzing the way we spend our time and seeing how it matches up with the priorities we have set for our life and our walk in faith. Either of the above exercises, I suspect, would generate a very fruitful discussion in a circle or in a group of women seeking to deepen their fellowship.

"Shalom: Hope for recovering stress-catchers," by Terry L. Bowes (**June**, p. 10), is another gold mine. Do you see yourself in the descriptions of stress-carriers, stress-catchers, or shalom-bearers? (We likely hold parts of each of these types in ourselves—in varying proportions.) Alone or as a group, ponder ways to become more like a shalom-bearer.

Then think of the shalom-bearers in your life. Perhaps clip this article

and send it to one of them with a note of thanks. Such an encouraging word can only increase the shalom quotient in our world!

Kathryn Lay's "Four ways to be a missionary at home" (**June**, p. 21) blessed me with its concrete, doable ideas. Could your circle follow up on the suggestion to offer friendship to an international student or a group of students? Would you be willing to be a tutor? Just giving the newcomer opportunities for conversation with a native English speaker can boost his or her skills and confidence immensely.

Finally, consider using P. K. McCary's "Choosing the good part" (**July/August**, p. 42) as a discussion or devotion topic in your group. You might begin by reading or acting out the exchange between Mary, Martha, and Jesus in Luke 10. Ask women to reflect first on which of the sisters they identify with more and then to try stepping into the other sister's shoes. McCary's article helped me think harder about *blending* the gifts of the two. Both are needed for the work of God's kingdom!

Blessings as you go about that work! **LWT**

*Barbara Hofmaier
Director for Educational Resources
Women of the ELCA*

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LWT EDITORIAL OFFICE

Women of the ELCA

8765 West Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631-4189

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